LEGENDS OF THE ARACH KNIGHT

#81

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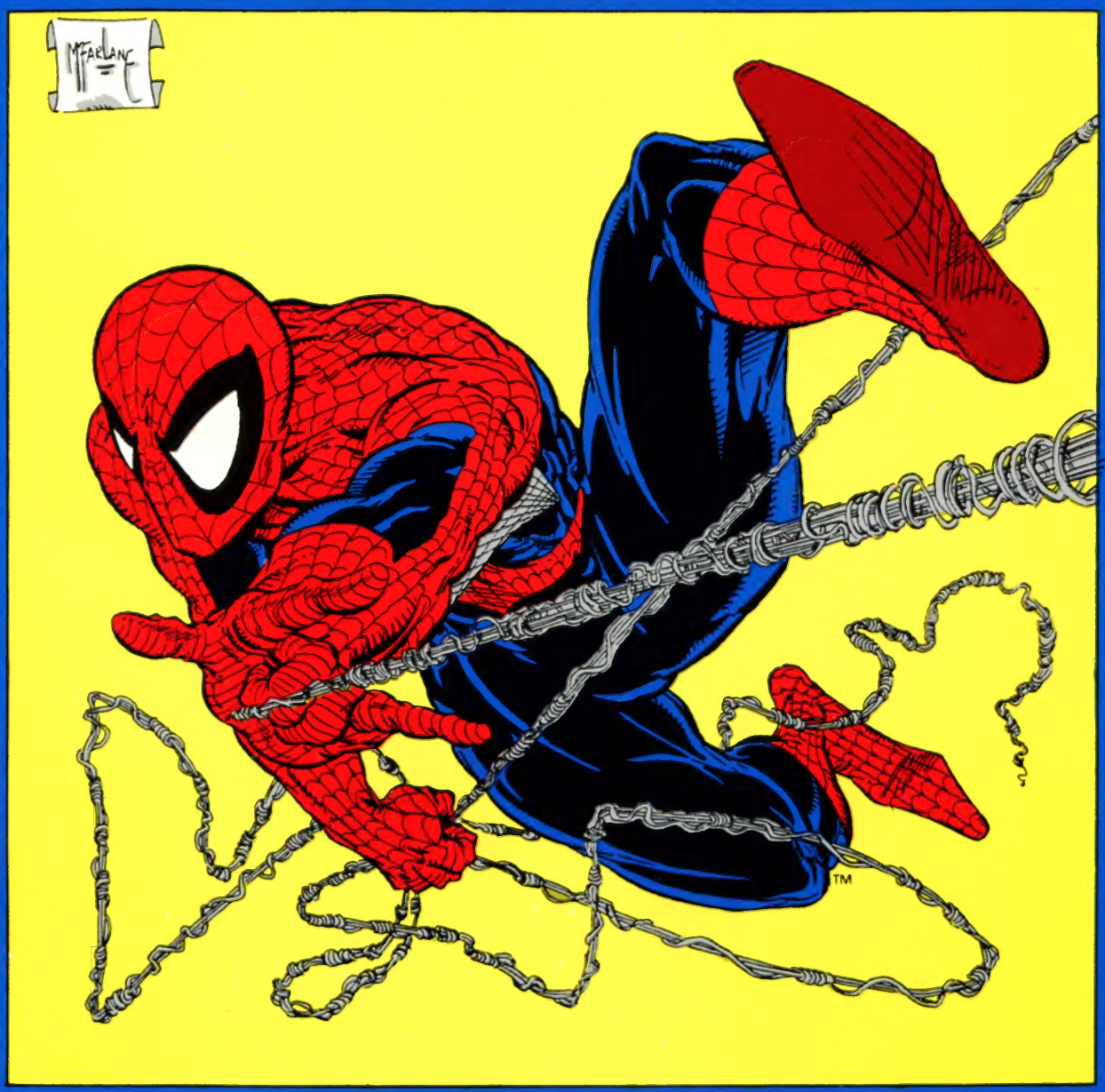

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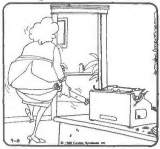

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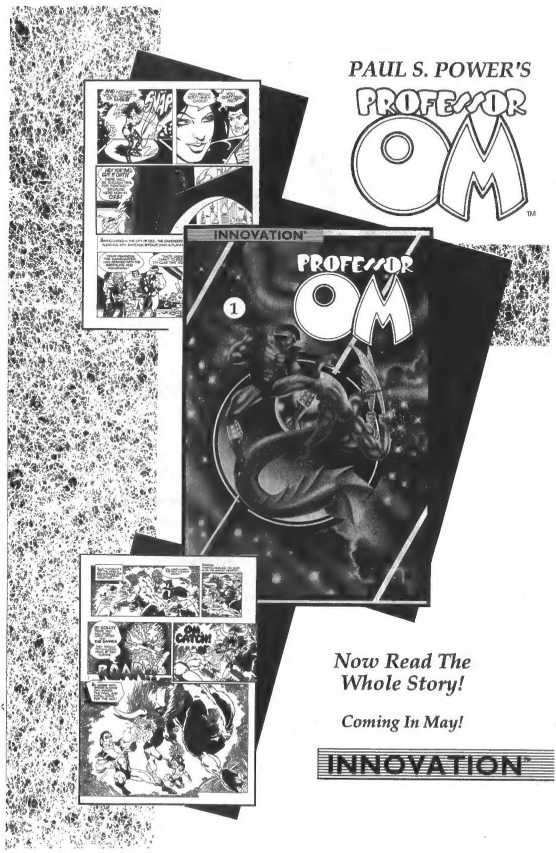
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cover contributed by
TODD McFARLANE
art
JRM
colors

Art: Jim Salicrup

UP FRONT

By the time you read this, I'll have winged my way to TSR/West to act as consultant on the new line of monthly comics modules coming your way this summer. Yes, the folks best known for DUNGEONS & DRAGONS and a big bunch of other role-playing games are going to take a bash at a species of comics/gaming hybrids.

For my part, it's a welcome chance to meet with some old friends, make some new ones, and exercise skills forged years ago in the fires of Marvel and DC comics and since honed to a fine edge publishing my own line of comics, magazines and books.

But never fear — I'm not abandoning COMICS INTERVIEW.

For also by the time this editorial sees print, I'll already be back at the head of the ever-burgeoning Comics Interview Group of publications. And the best just keeps getting better, as they say. The most recent — and by far the funniest — magazine to join our ranks is COMICS EXPRESS (advertised elsewhere in this issue); take a tip from me, subscribe *now* — as Arthur would say: it's *funny*.

And there are still more surprises in store. After all, the '80s saw the birth of COMICS INTERVIEW magazine, the addition of comics such as SOUTHERN KNIGHTS, MICRA, X-THIEVES, CYCOPS and THE LAST SUPERHERO, followed by COMICS INTERVIEW SPECIAL EDITIONS and SUPER SPECIALS.

Then COMICS REVUE magazine – featuring syndicated comic strips such as MODESTY BLAISE, CALVIN & HOBBES, BATMAN and many more — became a Comics Interview Publication. And now, most recently, COMICS EXPRESS has joined our ranks to bring you the hippest humor of the '90s.

We have not been recumbent *al fresco* upon our laurels! We're fit and in fighting trim to face the '90s here at Comics Interview Group, and we want you with us.

— David

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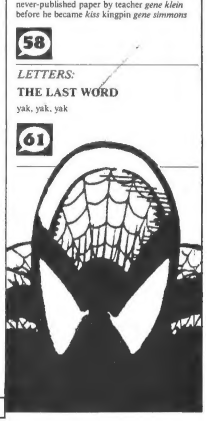

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WRITER/ARTIST

"I like to draw big, exciting stuff. Maybe it sounds dumb."

TODD McFARLANE

That Todd McFarlane loves drawing the adventures of Spider-Man is a matter of record. What he said, in fact, was that he would stay on the book for as long as Marvel would let him. So it was quite a shock when late in 1989 he announced that he would be leaving THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN to go on to another project. Of course, what we did not know then — those sneaky Marvel folks waited a few more weeks to make the big announcement — was that the new McFarlane project was a new series starring our favorite web-slinger. What's coming up? We asked Spider-Editor Jim Salicrup, and he delivered this exclusive . . .

JIM SALICRUP: *Why don't you tell me about your trip to the Philippines?*

TODD McFARLANE: The trip to the Philippines? I went to Singapore and I did a convention with **Mike Grell** — in Singapore they're pretty big on Marvel and DC super-hero comic books. And at the end of this convention, it was late at night, a couple of reporters from Malaysia came over and wanted to do an interview with **Mike Grell** and myself. It was getting pretty late, so Mike took them to his room and was going to do a short interview with them, and then they'd come over to my room and do a deal with me, and we'd be done with them. It was about eleven o'clock at night when Mike took them away.

Then all of a sidden it was two o'clock in the morning and they still hadn't come over, and I was getting groggy and drowsy and stuff. So I phoned Mike and said, "Mike, were are the reporters?" They were still at Mike's room doing *his* interview, and he said they would be along in five minutes. Another *hour* went by and they still didn't come, so I get in bed and phone up Mike a second time to say, "Forget it, I'm not doing the interview. It's too late, you guys aren't being very kind." Then I heard a knocking at the door, and the two reporters came in. So I said, "You guys got five minutes and then I have to kick you out 'cause I got to get some sleep, you know."

So they want me to get dressed to take a picture! It's three o'clock in the morning and I'm not in a terrific mood, so I go, "Wrong. This is what we're going to do: I'm going to sit up in bed and I'll give you a smile, and you can take a close-up and crop it and slap it on your article." So they took their picture and they went their merry way after asking a few questions. And about two months later I started getting deluged with mail from Malaysia. My wife started opening it up, right. There's pictures of women

Interview

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"I could have dropped my drawers in the m

and marriage proposals, statistics of how much they weigh. (Laughter.)
You name it, it was there. We were getting bundles every single day, mostly from Malaysia. And we found out, finally — one of the letters was from a
HIS NAME--
SPIDER-MAN!
HIS POWERS--
EXTRAORDINARY!

Double-page spread from SPIDER-MAN #1 by writer/artist Todd McFarlane.

th[illegible]ulpen and nobody would have even cared."

guy and he sent me this article — what they had done was they took that picture of me in bed but they never cropped anything. I was in bed, sleeping in the buff, and I had the blanket down to my waist, and because I had propped myself up I'm flexing kind of, bare chested. *(Laughter.)* And anybody who's seen me playing sports and stuff, I'm not a bad looking guy, I'm still in pretty good shape. So they put this picture in there, and they put my home address in the article, and a bogus seven-figure salary that I was pulling down. *(Laughter.)* In U.S. dollars, no less. So we got close to 200 letters from both the women *and* the men, and it was pretty funny.

JIM: *We'll do that in COMICS INTERVIEW, run that same picture with your home address*

TODD: Let's make it an eight-figure salary. *(Laughter.)* Todd "Donald Trump" McFarlane. *(Laughter.)*

JIM: *Let's go right into SPIDER-MAN, how did that work out?*

TODD: How did it work out — it's *still* working out. It's been doing okay. I came into the SPIDER-MAN office, kind of told you some of the changes I wanted to make — although it was probably a four or five-month gap by the time I started. I think a few of the changes that I brought up were maybe forgotten by the time that they saw print. I think I gave you guys a bit of a heart attack on some of the things.

JIM: *What were the changes?*

TODD: *Cosmetic* changes, nothing that big. The ones that you can see now, the bigger eyes, more black in the costume, more webbing in the costume — the spaghetti webbing as **Tom DeFalco** dubbed it. Just trying to make him a little more funky, you know. It was my way of kind of going back to the first, maybe, three or four issues of what **Steve Ditko** did, but without actually *doing* **Steve Ditko**. It was my *perception* of doing **Steve Ditko**, and what my memory of **Steve Ditko's** SPIDER-MAN is, without actually looking at the artwork. I'm just kind of putting it in there with my style for the 1990s, kind of *updating* it.

JIM: *What made you come up with that crazy webbing?*

TODD: That crazy webbing? I actually can't take credit for that. The webbing idea came from an old black-and-white piece. Years ago you guys used to put out these black-and-white portfolios, around

"It was my perception of doing Steve Ditko."

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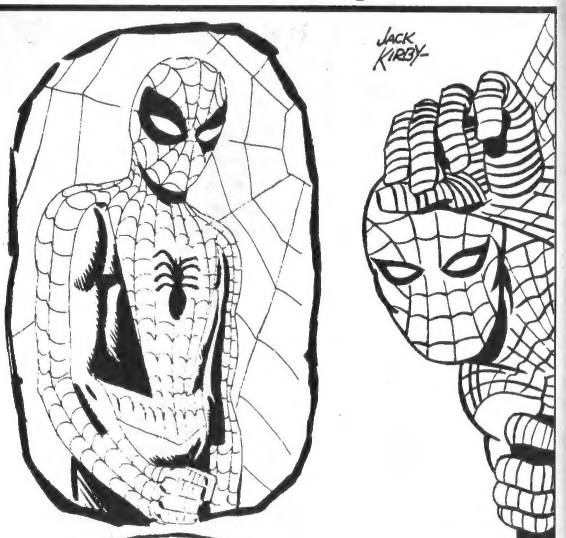


Left: The original web-slinger by Steve Ditko, while at the right we have an illo by Jack Kirby (the original costume designer).

1980 or something like that, and there was one piece that was the Defenders by **Mike Golden,** and for whatever reason he had Spider-Man in it. He did this great Spider-Man with this funky webbing, and I *kept* that piece out of all the pieces. And I go, "If I ever turn into a comic-book pro, and if I ever work for Marvel Comics, and if I *ever* get to do SPIDER-MAN, I'm going to do webbing like that!"

And this was in 1980, so I was just a baby collecting comic books. *(Laughter.)* Nineteen years of age and it just kind of *hit* me like a bolt, so when I finally got my chance I go, "Yeah, it's time to dig out that drawing that **Mike Golden** did and do the spaghetti webbing!" He had to do it *straight*, it was my idea to make it kind of like a cowboy guy; but the ultimate origin of the spaghetti webbing, the honors go to **Mike Golden.**

JIM: *What about the big eyes?*

TODD: The big eyes, I'll have to give credit on *that* to **Steve Ditko.** Looking *back* on the stuff, he didn't actually make them as big as I thought he did. And *that's* where a lot of the stuff that I did with Spider-Man . . . I *thought* that **Ditko** did it, you know. When I look at it I see he didn't really, but my mind was telling me that he did these things — the eyes were real big and the costume was real black and that there was ten times as much webbing and stuff like that. If you ask me to go back and *dissect* it, from a professional view he didn't do a lot of that stuff. So it actually turned out better that I didn't actually look at the stuff, that I just kind of pulled from my memory what I *thought* was in it.

JIM: *You also beefed him up.*

TODD: What?

JIM: *You beefed him up.*

TODD: I beat up Spider-Man?

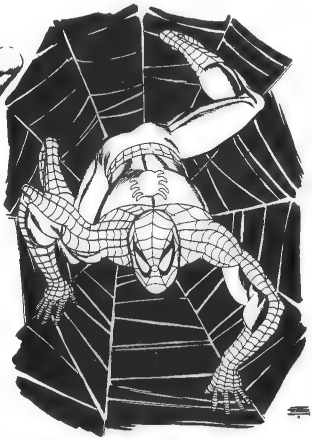
JIM: *You beefed him up, added more weight.*

TODD: Oh, *beefed* him up — ah! I beat

"I still like the scrawny-looking Spider-Man."

I THOUGHT SOME EXTRACURRICULAR WALL CRAWLING WOULD RELAX ME--
BUT I'M MORE UPTIGHT THAN EVER!
I KEEP GETTING THIS WARNING TINGLE-- BUT I CAN'T FIND ANY DANGER!
SO NOW I'VE GOT A NEW WORRY--
MAYBE I CAN'T TRUST MY SPIDER SENSE ANYMORE!
THWIP!
JOHN ROMITA

Above: Spidey by John Romita Sr. Left: by Sal Buscema's older brother John. Below: Gil "Sugar" Kane's version.



him up. *No! (Laughter.)* Yeah, I guess I did beef him up a bit, although I still like the scrawny-looking Spider-Man. Sometimes I go for *that* look, the odd time. I was actually *trying* to make a leaner guy, you know, but it didn't work out that way. I guess because I have a tendency to put another ripple in the arms and stuff like that. But he isn't big and chunky like the Hulk. And the kids today, I find, don't really *like* the scrawny super-hero, they like their guy to look like he's solid.

JIM: *You haven't mentioned John Romita.*

TODD: John Romita, when I first went into doing SPIDER-MAN, in *my* mind

"Right now I'm at this cocky point in my life."

John Romita did the definitive Spider-Man. I mean, **Ditko** created the character and refined him, but the Spider-Man that I remember, and that I think most everybody else remembers, from cartoons and from all the merchandising and stuff, *comes* from **John Romita**, you know. When I took over the book it wasn't that I didn't *like* **John Romita's** Spider-Man, it was quite the opposite. I was in such awe of his stuff, and thought that he did such a perfect job, that I would have been a *fool* to try to emulate what he had done.

I could either do a bad **John Romita** imitation or I could kind of pull some of the things I liked from John and some of the things that I liked from **Steve Ditko,** and some of the stuff that I was doing at that point, and kind of meld it and throw it onto the page with a '90s look and hope that it was different. My attitude was never that *my* way was better than anybody else's way, it was just it was different. That is *always* my attitude when I do *anything*, from the inking to the writing, hopefully. I might fail sometimes, and I might succeed other times, but I'm going to try to do something different and hopefully keep you off base.

Right now I'm at this cocky point in my life, and that was all it was. It was *more* of a tribute to John *not* to draw like him, although it seems the opposite. I would have been a fool to do a bad **John Romita** style. I guess I should have made that more clear when I went off in my direction — I don't think my stuff is any better or any worse than anybody else's.

JIM: *What about the critics who don't have kind things to say about your anatomy?*

TODD: *(Laughter.)* The critics? I'm not one for saying bad things about people, so . . . The easiest answer would be: If you don't like it, don't buy it. It's simple, you know. It's over. The nightmare is over, just stop buying it and you don't have to have any problems with it. Really, I don't *worry* about the critics all that much, because at this point they can't really take anything away from me — as a matter of fact, *any* lip service I can get at this point in my career, I'll take it. I actually — being the naive young child that I am — I take it as a compliment. If somebody's got something bad to say, then it's like I know that I'm one of the top guys in the business at that point.

When I was doing INFINITY and even my first year at Marvel, nobody gave a shit about me. I could have dropped my drawers in the middle of the Bullpen and nobody would have even cared, you know. But *now* . . . If you *look* a different way then it's news to people, so whatever. Like I said, I'm not really that concerned about what they say. What I'm concerned about is whether the kids who are *buying* it *like* it, you know. If the sales go down then that tells me they don't like it, and if the sales go up then that means they do. And the sales have gone up a little bit since I've been on the book, so I take it as the people who buy it *like* it. If you're buying it and you *hate* it, that doesn't make any sense to me. Go buy a book that you like

JIM: *How did you like working with David Michelinie?*

TODD: He was, he was, he was . . . I'm kind of like a weird artist. I worked for **Roy Thomas** a few years and I had *some* contact with him because he was my editor, but I worked for like a year and a half with **Peter David,** then two years with **Dave Michelinie,** and you can almost count on one hand the amount of times I have talked to the writer I kind of take a stance that I don't talk to the writers, tell them anything about their writing, and they don't have the right to talk to me about my artwork

I've found that the writers that I've worked for, especially David, actually *wanted* feedback from me. He wanted me to give him story ideas, he wanted me to have more input into it — but I kind of took that stance. And by the time that I felt that I *had* some ideas for the book, I felt it wouldn't be fair to him to, like, change the rules of the game. The book was doing okay with him doing the story and me doing the artwork, we weren't really suffering or anything like that. Maybe I frustrate the writers that I work for because I don't ever talk to them, but it's worked out for me. Everybody does their own thing.

JIM: *What made you decide to write your own Spider-Man book?*

TODD: *(Does an Eddie Murphy laugh.)*

JIM: *The question everybody wants to know.*

TODD: You're pushing me. You want me to come up with something, like, gooey and greasy, right?

JIM: *Just the facts.* (Laughter)

TODD: Just the facts, there we go. The facts, if you know me, I'm kind of a cocky young kid. When I was penciling, the reason I broke in being a penciller was that I thought that most people would send in their samples because they think that they can do it better than the guys that *are* doing it, or *most* of the guys that are doing it. And the same thing happened with the inking, you know. I wasn't satisfied with the inking and I thought I could do something a little bit different and be a little more true to what I wanted on the page.

And then once I became a little bit more adept at inking, it's like, "Well, let's go to the next thing." And right now the next thing is writing. After doing two

"I don't have to tie this in with the other Spidey books."

Spidey, about to be slimed, the McFarlane way, from the cover of #3.

years on the book, a lot of ideas that I have are stored in the back of my mind and there's only one way to get them on paper, that's to write them myself. It wouldn't be fair to David to all of a sudden graft my ideas to his. Maybe not, maybe that would have been the way to go, but I'm at the ballsy stage.

A lot of the guys that I collected, the **Millers** and the **Chaykins** and the **Byrnes** and the **Perezes** and the **Ordways**, all turned out to be pretty decent writers and still continued to do their artwork. So I guess I was kind of molded in *that* venue. Those were the people in the last five years that I've admired, and they went on to do their own gigs. So I'm just seeing if I can do my own gig.

JIM: *So, what's coming up in the new Spider-Man book?*

TODD: What do you mean, you're the editor, you know! *(Laughter.)*

JIM: *But they want to hear it from you.*

TODD: Oh, okay. We're planning it — because in your inimitable wisdom you have deemed it that I *don't* have to tie this book in with the other Spider-Man books, which I think is a good move because of my lack of writing ability . . . it would be another burden on me that I probably wouldn't be able to get over. So, if I remember right, you told me you wanted the new book to kind of play it like "mini-series within a series" where the stories have their own beginnings and own ends, whether it takes one issue or takes four or five issues to tell the story, and then we just pick up another story and not have to carry stuff over from the

"I don't have to come up with that many ideas, actually."

other Spider-Man books.

So, going on that premise, it's been working out rather well. The point is all I've got to do is come up with three ideas and stretch them out and I've got a year and a half's worth of books. *(Laughter.)* I don't have to come up with that many ideas, actually. But, in the *first* five issues — because I found out through you and your Spidey office that some of the villains were already taken by the other Spidey books; we'll have to do a villain draft next year *(Laughter.)* But, I decided to do a five-part story and bring in a female villainess; because there's not really *that* many *bad* female villains. I'm going to see whether I *can* make a *bad* female villain. The character, in my mind, I tried to come up with something bad to equal the bad of Dr. Doom in a female character.

So, the first five issues of the new book will be . . . basically, the first issue will be a setup issue, and then the next four issues will take place in the span of maybe two to four hours — it takes us four months to get those four hours. *(Laughter.)* It's just going to be one long night, a *bad* night for Spider-Man, and at the end of this bad night . . . it's going to look for these first few issues like a Spidey and Lizard story, but by the end of issue #2 or in issue #3 there's going to be a little bit of a U-turn and you're going to see that it's not what it seems — it'll turn in a different direction

JIM: *And we're calling this book LEGENDS OF THE ARACHNID.*

TODD: Yeah, and we're going to do a protective cover! *(Laughter.)* And we're going to give our reason why — because it sells more copies! *(Laughter.)*

JIM: *And there'll be 64 different editions*

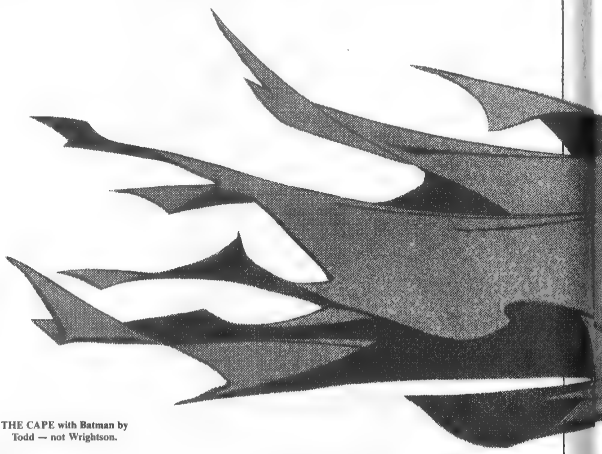
TODD: We could possibly top the 30-million mark on this book! *(Laughter.)* We'll suck everybody into buying 64 copies each, you know. It would work, even if they did have to stop buying every other book for the month.

JIM: *The people reading this will think you're the most crass and cynical guy in the world. You have to bare your artistic soul for them, Todd.*

TODD: Oh, no no no no. I just have to give the critics a couple more things to take jabs at me for. *(Laughter.)* Then I get more lip service, more advertising. If there's one criticism that a person wants to give, it's that I probably won't ever give you the "formula" comic book. If I have control over it, you're not going to get a "formula" comic book. If you *want* a "formula" comic book, if you want a "formula" type of drawing and some other things. I'm not the man to give it to you.

JIM: *Anything else you want to say to the boys and girls out there?*

TODD: To the boys and girls out there, as Jim will testify, I'll listen to the readers more than I'll listen to my editors. *(Laughter.)* That's part of the cockiness that goes along with the package right now, of dealing with me. But, in looking back on it, **Jim Salicrup,** the man of the hour, has been either one of the nicest guys or one of the dumbest guys in the



THE CAPE with Batman by Todd — not Wrightson.

"If I have control over it, you won't get a 'formula'"

business to put up with a lot of the stuff that I've done. At this point it's a risk to even give me a big-name character like Spider-Man, to *write* a book when I don't have any writing experience, to kind of let me go off in my direction and see if I can't do something a little bit off center and let the audience decide whether it's better or worse or anything.

So, don't always believe all of the stories you hear from people about different people. **Jim Salicrup** and **Roy Thomas** have been two of the nicest guys I've ever worked for, but other people would tell you different. I've been happy with my career so far, and maybe in a couple of years somebody else can come in there and take over the book and do a good job and I can kind of fade into oblivion. *(Laughter.)*

You probably aren't very interested in hearing about problems such as the ones which plagued this interview. Suffice it to say that Jim and Todd spoke at length, and as much as could be was salvaged from the tape. Now let's join Dwight and Todd to fill in some gaps . . .

DWIGHT JON ZIMMERMAN: *So, the SPIDER—MAN comic that you're doing, how is that going to be different from the other Spider-Man comics?*

TODD McFARLANE: We answered this question, Jim and I went into it *thoroughly!* What's the next question? No, I'm just kidding you, I can't even remember what we talked about.

DWIGHT: *Well, what I have from the transcript is that it's going to be outside of continuity.*

TODD: Yep.

DWIGHT: *How about other heroes and villains? Are you going to be having many guest stars?*

TODD: That will depend totally upon my mood. If I get moody and I just want to do Spider-Man and a bad guy or something, then I'll stick to that. If I decide I want to throw Captain America in there, if I want to draw Captain America, then hopefully I can work him in for some kind of storyline and make some kind of sense. I don't really have anything *concrete* right now because we *are* doing it out of continuity and we're trying to make most of the stories between three and five issues, you know. I don't want to start thinking about *too* many things and they won't come out until four or five years down the line. I don't want people to be waiting that long.

DWIGHT: *What do you really like about Spider-Man? What is there about Spider-Man that really grabs you?*

TODD: *Ooo-huhuhu!* Hey, good question! That's a deep one! You know, to tell you the truth, I guess I'm kind of like a simple kid when it comes down to it. I haven't really sat down — I guess I should, being the writer of the book — and *dissected* the guy. I've been drawing him for awhile and I just know how to draw him. He's a young kid and he might have a few common things with me in my life, something like that, but . . . you know, I really haven't gotten that deep into the guy. I've been doing him for two years and he seems like he would be the easiest guy to do right now, because everybody else I'd have to be starting from scratch and figuring out how to draw them, how to write them.

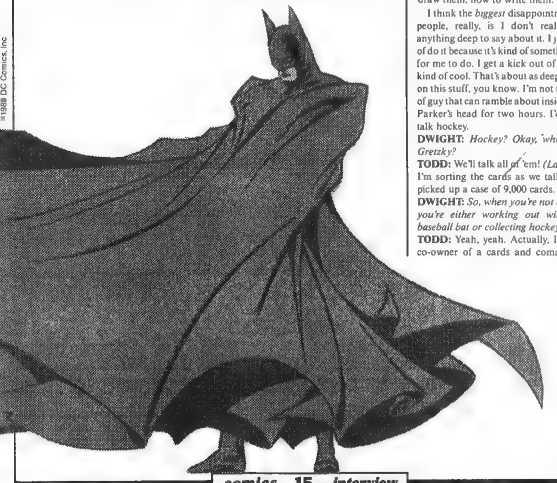
I think the *biggest* disappointment for people, really, is I don't really have anything deep to say about it. I just kind of do it because it's kind of something fun for me to do. I get a kick out of this; it's kind of cool. That's about as deep as I get on this stuff, you know. I'm not the kind of guy that can ramble about inside Peter Parker's head for two hours. I'd rather talk hockey.

DWIGHT: *Hockey? Okay, which one, Gretzky?*

TODD: We'll talk all of 'em! *(Laughter.)* I'm sorting the cards as we talk. I just picked up a case of 9,000 cards.

DWIGHT: *So, when you're not drawing you're either working out with your baseball bat or collecting hockey cards?*

TODD: Yeah, yeah. Actually, I am the co-owner of a cards and comics shop



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"I think a lot of guys get caught up in the book

right now.

DWIGHT: *You are?*

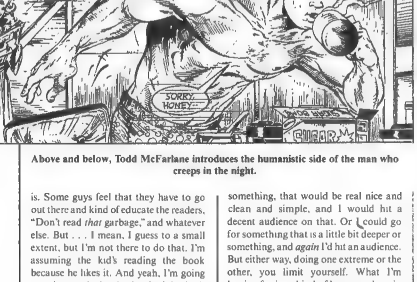
TODD: Yes. So besides it being a hobby and stuff, we also do a little bit of business with those old cards and stuff, and sell the comic books. Between the drawing and that and trying to spend some time with my wife, I'm usually pretty busy.

DWIGHT: *Well, as a retailer how do you view the wacky business?*

TODD: As a retailer - *(Laughter.)* You never try to guess why somebody — and this is Todd and not the words of wisdom for everybody out there — I stopped trying to figure out *why* a lot of people want this stuff and really see my duty more or less to supply what the demand

The cover from SPIDER-MAN #5, by Todd McFarlane.

and they don't look at the age of the reader."



Above and below, Todd McFarlane introduces the humanistic side of the man who creeps in the night.

is. Some guys feel that they have to go out there and kind of educate the readers, "Don't read *that* garbage," and whatever else. But . . . I mean, I guess to a small extent, but I'm not there to do that. I'm assuming the kid's reading the book because he likes it. And yeah, I'm going to point out the books that I might think are of a little bit higher grade or quality or something like that —

DWIGHT: *Like yours?*

TODD: No no no no no. I mean, I'll ram mine down their throats if they want it, but I don't make a judgment on *my* stuff, I never have. I like to let everybody else make the judgment. And I'm talking mostly, like, from the artistic point of view, or from the content. Plus, you have to look at it — I think a lot of guys get caught up in the book and they don't look at the age of the reader. Yeah, there are certain books that are kind of nice and they're pretty deep and whatever else, but that's not what an eight-year-old kid wants. I think a lot of people get caught into a groove and it's either got to be all or nothing. But, you know, a ten-year-old kid is going to be more inclined to follow a certain kind of book, a 15-year-old another kind of book, and at 25 and above there's going to be more inclination towards these other things. To try to sell *everybody* the same books is ridiculous. And I love super-hero comic books, I can guarantee I'm going to be selling them for a long time.

DWIGHT: *But will you be trying to give a little bit of your story to everybody; trying to reach as broad an audience with your —*

TODD: Yeah, yeah. Personally, I think that *probably* the toughest thing to do as a creator is to keep a wide audience. I could write something, or could draw something, that would be real nice and clean and simple, and I would hit a decent audience on that. Or I could go for something that is a little bit deeper or something, and *again* hit an audience. But either way, doing one extreme or the other, you limit yourself. What I'm hoping for is to kind of be somewhere in between where the storytelling is clear and the story has got enough action and stuff like that that the kids are going to like it, but there's enough nice art stuff and enough reading between the lines and having to think your way through the story line that the guys that are a little bit older, and even a lot older and still want Spider-Man, will be able to pick it up and say they haven't seen it a thousand times before. That's about as much as I can hope to accomplish.

DWIGHT: *Do you think that your success has given you more freedom or less freedom than before?*

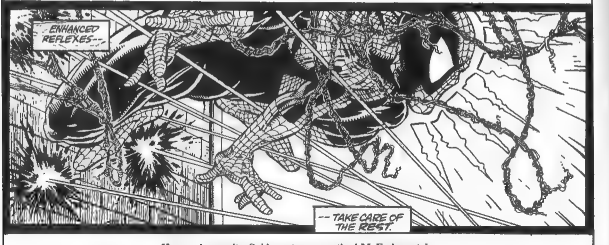
TODD: *(Does an Eddie Murphy laugh.)* I'd have to say, on a creative point of view, *more* freedom. I'm probably getting away with things, and *could* get away with things if I wanted to, than other people who aren't quite as successful as I am at this point in my career. They wouldn't be able to get away with some of these things. I'm not talking about the style or things like that, but . . . just becoming a writer, number one. I wouldn't have gotten away with that if I could only draw stick men, I guess. I pretty much used my artwork as the crowbar to get into writing, and it worked out where I was able to get a gig where I could write *and* draw. It might be the worst move that I've made, or the worst move that Marvel Comics has ever made . . . I don't know.

I flounder around with stuff like that. The creative part of it is . . . **Jim Salicrup,** who is the editor, and other people at Marvel have been . . . they've been easy with me, you know. I haven't had no complaints. I keep waiting for them to, like, drop the axe every now and then. I guess at this point they're kind of letting me have my head, and if I make a wrong turn I'm sure they'll be the first to let me know. So for now things have been successful, the sales haven't gone down or anything, and hopefully this new book will be fairly successful. I guess if it's a commercial success they'll probably keep letting me do what I do.

DWIGHT: *Have you ever looked at whether . . . scratch that question,* I'm *floundering now.*

TODD: You sorting hockey cards too? *(Laughter.)*

"I'm kind of like a sponge — I think



Here and opposite, Spidey gets some action! McFarlane style.

DWIGHT: *Let's get back to your retail store. When did you start that?*

TODD: The store opened the 9th of December of 89.

DWIGHT: *So this is a new thing.*

TODD: Yah.

DWIGHT: *Is it in Vancouver or where?*

TODD: It's just outside of Tacoma, Washington in a town called Puyallop. My brother-in-law runs it.

DWIGHT: *What gave you the bug to go in on a store?*

TODD: I had a *huge* comic-book collection, I gotta tell ya. I think the final count was around 25,000 items, heavy multiples of everything. It didn't go back that far, maybe 20 years. I'd been holding onto them and it just got to the point where I had to make a decision, and I decided I'd put them into the store. And plus, I had a lot of baseball cards too. We'd always collected cards. The only two things I really am an expert about are comic books and cards — I don't really know much of anything else. I couldn't talk politics or religion, but I can talk cards and comic books, so I thought, "Why not put that knowledge to use!" And I'll tell you, I know more about sports cards than I know about comic books — and I know a lot about comic books.

DWIGHT: *So, what's the hot sports card?*

TODD: The hot sports card — hey hey, you want my inside investment tips here? For basketball **Michael Jordan** is gold. For football right now **Joe Montana** seems to be the hot man. For baseball **Nolan Ryan** is gold. And for hockey **Wayne Gretzky** and **Mario Lemieux**, *gold!* Any kid buys those cards, they're not going to lose.

DWIGHT: *Have you ever gone to games and stood in line to get autographs?*

TODD: Get a player's autograph?

DWIGHT: *Yeah.*

TODD: Yeah, when I was a kid, sure. Everybody did that. You stand there and you're kind of shy and you go, "Mr. — Mr. — Mr. —" You didn't even care who it was. I mean, yes, you knew who the big guys were, and you always had one or two favorite guys, but you were happy as long as you got *an* autograph, and I think the kids are the same way today.

DWIGHT: *Who's influenced your art most?*

TODD: Who's *influenced* my art the most? Uh . . . To tell you the truth, no one guy. I could tell you who I think is the greatest, just visually I'd say **Mike Golden** is *stunning!* I've never seen a bad **Mike Golden** job. I love his stuff.

But I'm kind of like a sponge — I think most people are pretty much the same. You end up being like a sponge and pulling a couple of things that you like from this guy, a couple things from this guy, from that guy, and after hodgepodging it all together and playing with it for a couple of years you end up coming up with your own style. I've had some people come up to me and say my stuff looks like some guy and, like, I've never even cracked one of his books open. It's all in the eye of the beholder. I think most guys will tell you that.

And the reason why most guys become, like, their own style, is that once you get to a certain point and you're turning out so much work, you don't really have time to look at other guys' stuff. You've got to crank out your pages and you don't have time to analyze another guy's work. You've got deadlines; as a matter of fact, that's probably the best thing, because it forces you to become you.

DWIGHT: *Do you try to read other comic books, or do you find your schedule is just too full?*

TODD: Yeah, yeah, my schedule is pretty full. I stay on top of a few things. That probably is going to disappoint people. I think — I don't know whether it's egotistical or whatever — but I think that the *less* stuff that I actually look at that's comparable to the type of work that I'm doing, the better it is because then I don't have any preconceived notions about it. Especially on the writing end of it. The sponge, I do the same thing with the writing. I'll look at things that wouldn't directly tie into a super-hero comic book, or a Spider-Man type comic book.

My *biggest* thing that I want to accomplish on the book is to make it a little bit different. I think if I read too many super-hero comic books then I'm going to get caught up in kind of a certain way of presenting something. If I'm staring at a blank wall all day then I've just got to flounder my way through it; and hopefully within a year I will have dropped the bad habits and kept with the good habits and we'll have a nice product.

DWIGHT: *What does Todd McFarlane enjoy drawing most, Spider-Man in those wacky poses, the action scenes, or the women?* (Laughter.)

TODD: You know, to tell you the truth, I don't really think that I'm that good of an artist of females. I've had lots of people tell me they like the women, but I can rattle off 20 guys that can draw women a lot prettier and they've got the bodies

most people are pretty much the same."

down a lot better than I do, and they've got the body *language* down. It seems like it comes off more natural, you know

DWIGHT: *For instance?*

TODD: I've seen **Marc Silvestri** draw some dynamite women. **Mike Golden. George Perez.** There's a lot of guys, actually, that's what their forte is.

As for Spider-Man, it's not so much that I get off drawing Spider-Man per se. I would say, if I *have* to nail down one thing that I like to draw, I like to draw big and exciting things. Maybe that sounds dumb. I can remember . . . I didn't start collecting comic books until I was seventeen, so I'm one of the late bloomer guys. I guess the reason my attitude is the way that it is is that I wasn't one of those guys who'd been reading comic books since he was five. I kind of got in it as an afterthought. I was going to school and playing ball and I was going to be a baseball player — that was my *life* — and I kind of tripped into comic books.

So for me, mentally, I just do what I like to do. I just like to draw big visual stuff. As an artist, up until recently, I had no control over the storyline, really. I didn't know who was going to be in it, why they were going to be in it, what kind of motivations they had — I had no control of that. The only thing I had was that I was in control of the visuals, so I had to make it as visually exciting as possible. So, I love drawing big stuff. There's a lot of guys, **Perez** and **Adams** and **Silvestri**, who can draw a million tiny little guys, and I *envy* them. I can't draw them — I like the big stuff.

And that *probably*, in a roundabout way . . . **Kirby**, as much of a **Kirby** influence that you can see in me, my stuff is patterned after this perception of **Kirby. Kirby** seems to always hit you over the head with big visuals, and that's all I do. If you're going to buy SPIDER-MAN I'm going to give you big visuals, a big Spider-Man. If I were to draw IRON MAN then I would draw a big Iron Man. If I were to draw WOLVERINE I guarantee you I'd give you some big Wolvernes. I assume that there's a reason why you're buying that book, and visually I'll hit you over the head with this stuff.

DWIGHT: *Did Spider-Man give you more of an opportunity to play around with those visuals than other super-hero would? Spider-Man being Spider-Man, did what he is, and his environment, give you more of an opportunity to play around and get into extremes of posture and angles and anything like that, as compared, for instance, with Iron Man?*

TODD: Yeah. Because of the characters I'd say that's true. Going in, I don't think it really . . . maybe it did, who knows? But I don't think it really expanded me or contracted me as an artist. What I find is when I get on a book and I'm totally floundering — if I was to jump onto a new character I would be floundering on that book for the first four to six months — by doing repetition and I like the books that have single characters, too after four or five issues I start to get a feel for what I'm drawing. For the first couple of months — this is why I try to stay away from fill-in issues — it's, "Okay, his belt's like this, the boots go here." You go through the paces and gradually you start to know what you're doing.

This is why I'm sticking with Spider-Man, is that I can now dive into the new SPIDER-MAN book with the whole repertory behind me. If I went over to IRON MAN, for instance, I would look at him totally different. I would say, "Okay, what can I do that's different?" I think **Bob Layton's** done the definitive Iron Man, but I would say, "How can I

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"I've got no place to go but downward."

make him glide through the air in a way that's never been done before? What kind of high tech stuff can I add that's never been done before? What hasn't been done before that I could do?" Doing a shot of Iron Man here and there doesn't allow me to think about it for eight hours a day.

But I'm drawing Spider-Man eight hours a day and I have to, like, problem-solve the guy, because otherwise you're just going to see the same picture over and over. What was I . . . oh, yeah, about Spider-Man being any different being Spider-Man, I don't think so because on any other character I would have done the exact same process and gone into the directions of that character.

DWIGHT: *Is there a character that you haven't drawn that you'd like to take a crack at?*

TODD: You know . . . again, I hate to buck the notion that I have all these things that I'm just cracking to do. I've got a lot of energy, I gotta tell you that — and I'm sure my wife and Jim can verify that. I just don't do it because I have to do it, but I go to each job first as a professional — this is the book I'm doing, I'm going to do the best job possible.

If you push me into a corner, other than Spider-Man right now, I wouldn't mind taking a crack at Batman. Not because I have any great fondness for Batman, but he's *probably* one of the easiest guys to *draw!* You just put that cape around his body and you never have to draw anatomy. *(Laughter.)* The odd hand and the odd foot, the head, and this cape all over the place, and you're done! You don't have to worry about whether his biceps are in the right place. That's why I like capes, 'cause capes cover up a lot of the anatomy.

DWIGHT: *Will we get to see Spider-Man with a cape?*

TODD: No, no. The reason that I do the *webbing* the way that I do is because it's in lieu of a cape. I've always loved capes because I think they give a great sense of depth and a great sense of motion. I could have Batman standing there in a majestic pose just picking his nose. Literally! Doing nothing but picking his nose. It would look like there's a lot happening because there would be this majestic stance, and the cape would be billowing in eight directions in the wind, you know. He'd look like a god figure.

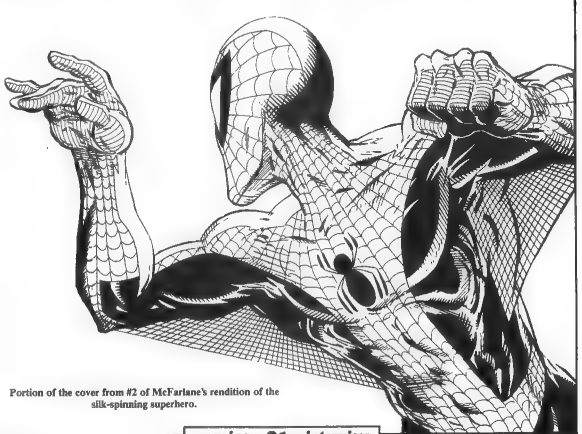
And Spider-Man never had that. Everybody's perched him up on top of buildings and whatever else, and I needed to add something *more*. So I go, "He doesn't have a cape but he's got *webs!* Wouldn't it be cool if it looked like the webs were all over the place, like blowing in the wind!" That's why I do the webs the way that I do.

DWIGHT: *Is there anything special that you'd like to add?*

TODD: Oh, something *deep* you mean? You've come to the wrong well.

DWIGHT: *Not necessarily deep but something Todd.*

TODD: Ah, Jesus, now you've put the pressure on. I would like to say that because I've been on the book that I've been on — I happened to be at the right place at the right time, really — I know in my mind that I've got no place to go but downwards. And I know that as I'm going down in the eyes of the audience, which is okay because everything's in cycles, that I'll be turning out better work. If people think they've seen the best that I've got, I've got plenty more years that I hope to be in the business and hopefully it's going to get better. I've just begun to get geared up.



Portion of the cover from #2 of McFarlane's rendition of the silk-spinning superhero.

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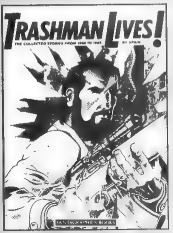

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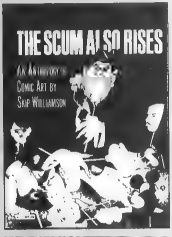

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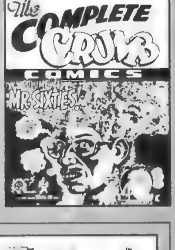

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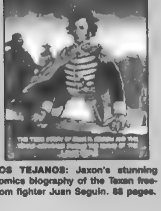

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"When they asked me to do FLASH DAN BARRY"

We first met Dan Barry and Gail Beckett, his righthand woman on the FLASH GORDON syndicated strip, at the Georgia home of renowned SF artists Ron and Val Lakey Lindahn. Dan amazed us all that evening with wild tales of comics days gone by. We were surprised to learn that Dan lives only a scant 22 miles from Screamer Mountain and we left knowing this interview was inevitable.

DAK made mention of all this to Rick Norwood, whose COMICS REVUE magazine was on the verge of joining the Comics Interview Group of publications. For those of you unfamiliar with the magazine, COMICS REVUE collects major syndicated newspaper comic strips, and features current runs of FLASH GORDON, MODESTY BLAISE, THE PHANTOM and many others.

It was these negotiations that finally brought Rick Norwood out of his corner of Tennessee down to the foothills of the Blue Ridge mountains: territory of the greater and lesser spotted Lindahns, Krafts and Barrys.

At Rick's request, the interview was delayed until his arrival, and so it was that on a memorable Sunday afternoon and evening, Norwood, DAK and Julia Mather made their way to Dan Barry's for lunch, dinner, and too much wine! A mammoth interview ensued, and here in part one Dan talks about Harvey Kurtzman, Joe Heller, the Simon & Kirby studio, how Edgar Rice Burroughs and Stan Lee were alike, and much more info on the early Golden Age of Comics . . .

RICK NORWOOD: *Your interferon strip got into TIME MAGAZINE. That's good publicity.*

DAN BARRY: It got into SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN and the AMERICAN MEDICAL JOURNAL and the NEW YORK TIMES science section, as well as TIME.

RICK: *Who pushed that?*

DAN: I don't know. I'm sure King Features did nothing to gain the publicity. I think the medical writers in each of the above cases just did their homework. And by now, that particular strip must be listed in medical references somewhere. The PR people at King *never* read the strip. So they never pushed it.

The use of interferon in the strip was **Harry Harrison's** idea. He was plotting my stories then. Living in Denmark, he met the men who were developing interferon. In fact, I heard Harry even suggested the name.

RICK: *Really? I thought it was already called interferon even back when you did that strip.*

DAN: It was. The strip in question didn't happen until some years later.

RICK: *Oh, I see. But here, Flash Gordon said it would happen; this is one of the ten most famous characters in the whole world.*

DAN: FLASH is synonymous with the future. Yet, in 1934, it had started as a contemporary strip; only Zarkov was ahead of his time. When I launched the daily strip in November of '51, I decided to fudge on dates and make it a "somewhat futurist" feature. I also hedged on some of the sillier fantasy aspects of the strip.

Don Moore, the original writer, got tired of walking the date tightrope and just made it future. He made it BUCK ROGERS, and the strip went downhill in spite of **Mac Raboy's** fine artwork. Mac suffered from some awful stories when Don bowed out. Then came

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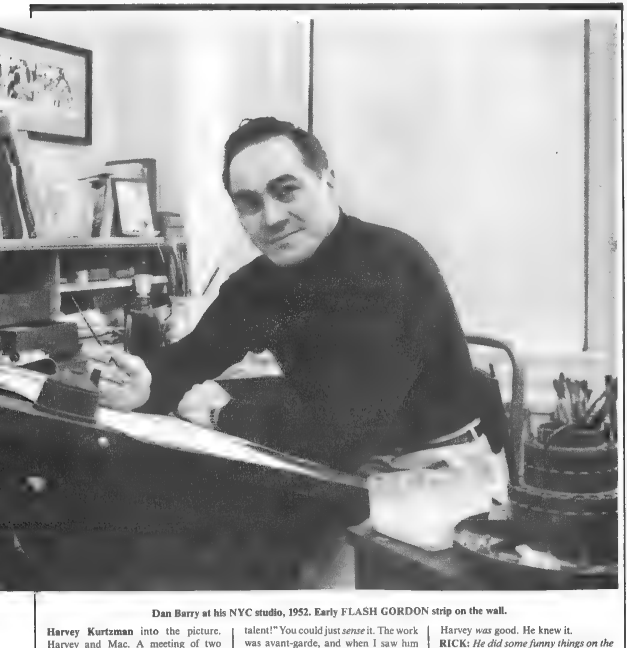
GORDON, I said, 'Jesus, get somebody else!'"



Dan Barry at his NYC studio, 1952. Early FLASH GORDON strip on the wall.

Harvey Kurtzman into the picture. Harvey and Mac. A meeting of two opposites! A fiasco. I had great problems working from Harvey's layouts; Mac absolutely rebelled at the idea!

At the time I first met **Harvey Kurtzman** he still talked like a Bronx boy. I was *shocked*. He was slightly balding, in his twenties, and it was at the time when comics were in their first terrible depression. **Burne Hogarth** — a great crusader — was involved in organizing a comics guild though he had no stake in it. I met Harvey there. I had seen one page of his, a filler in a comic book. It was so way out, and it was clear: "This guy has talent!" You could just *sense* it. The work was avant-garde, and when I saw him across the room he looked the type: very intellectual, very bright. I introduced myself. "Uh, yeah, hiya." *(Laughter.)* Not the sound I expected. Harvey made it clear that night, he had no doubts of his own genius. He was talking about his idea for MAD, and this was a few years before MAD happened — in fact he started MAD at the time he was working with me on the FLASH strip. He said, "I could always entertain. I just trust my instincts, I don't have to think twice. If I don't like it, it's not good." Talk about an ego! *(Laughter.)* No, it was not egotism. Harvey *was* good. He knew it.

RICK: *He did some funny things on the strip. There was the little mizard, do you remember, and whatever the characters would be doing, the little mizard in the background would —*

DAN: The mizard was mine; Harvey came in in the *middle* of that sequence.

RICK: *Really?*

DAN: Yes.

RICK: *I loved that. There were four panels, with the queen and the little boy crying —*

DAN: Oh, when the mizard died?

RICK: *The mizard is lying there and you think the mizard is dead, and they're*

"Flash Gordon is synonymous with the future."

weeping, and in the last panel the mizard sits up, sees them weeping, and he starts crying, too. (Laughter.) It's just beautiful.

DAN: If I had to pick some of the greatest strips I had ever seen in comics, there are one or two **Milton Caniff** strips and *that* one.

RICK: *Was Kurtzman the writer on that?*

DAN: *That* was Harvey's. I think I did some justice to it in the artwork, but it was all Harvey.

RICK: *Did you have an inker on that?*

DAN: That stuff I was pencilling and inking.

RICK: *Around then Jack Davis did some stuff for you —*

DAN: Jack Davis, and **Frazetta** and Al [redacted]

RICK: *Did Wally Wood ever do any pencils for you?*

DAN: No. Wally was a good, close friend, he posed for Flash a couple of times. *(Laughter.)* No, I never could get Wally to help me, he was too busy. He would have been *ideal* to help me, because he was *marvelous*. I loved his work!

RICK: *Some of the machines look a little bit like Wally Wood work, like the cornucopia machine that would give you anything you wanted.*

DAN: That may have been influenced by **Wood.** When they asked me to do FLASH GORDON, I said, "Jesus, get somebody else!" *(Laughter.)* "I *hate* science fiction!"

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT: *That was how many years ago?*

Classic appearance of the Mizard (the alien lizard): 10/15/62.

DAN: Well . . . 1951. I said no about five times, and the reason I said yes — it's weird — is that my personal life was breaking down. I was in a *miserable* marriage and I decided to get out, and I was aware that I might go through a tailspin when I did, with the guilt — I had two kids and this was back when *nobody* got divorced, you didn't leave your kids, especially with my Jewish moral background. My family never did forgive me. But, I decided that I *might* need the steady income. I mean, I was writing, I had a business going, I was in partnership with THE NEW YORK POST, I had a little office next to **Walt Kelly** and got to know him, and it was a great period in my life. But when everything fell apart I was afraid, knowing myself, that I might not be able to work, I'd go into a depression and like that.

So, I accepted about a *third* of what I was earning elsewhere to take on the strip. Of course back then, every cartoonist *dreamed* about it, that was the place to be, in the *syndicates!* It's ironic how adventure strips are now dying.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Dan Barry
Born: 11 July 1923 — Long Beach, NJ
Occupation: Cartoonist, Fine Art Painter, Writer
Credits: Comic Books: 1941-42 (with Mickey Spillane): BLUE BOLT, GREEN HORNET. For Marvel: SUB-MARINER, HUMAN TORCH, TOMMY TYME (1), CAPTAIN AMERICA. For Hillman: AIRBOY, THE HEAP, GUNMASTER, SKY WOLF, IRON ACE. For Fawcett: CAPTAIN MIDNIGHT, SPY SMASHER, BULLETMAN. For Biro/Wood: DAREDEVIL, MR. CRIME. For DC: VIGILANTE, ALAN LADD, MR. DISTRICT ATTORNEY. 1949-51: Advertising comic books. **Syndicated:** TARZAN daily (1948, 49), MELBA (for Will Eisner), FLASH GORDON (1951-present), SPIDER-MAN (1986). **Fine Arts:** 16 one-man shows, museum galleries in U.S., France, Denmark, Germany, Austria. Sixty-plus invitational group exhibition. One-Hour Special, DAVID SUSSKIND SHOW. Special Exhibits, Lincoln Center. U.S. Embassies in Europe. Grumbacher 21 U.S. artist traveling exhibit. Lecturer, teacher Springfield (MA) Museum Fine Art, Tirol State Museum. **Movie Posters:** FLASH GORDON, HURRICANE, SHARK BOY OF BORA BORA (?).
Favorite Films: SS POTEMKIN, WAR AND PEACE (USSR), "M" (German), all Chaplin, Paul Mum, THE NATURAL.
Favorite Artists: Milton Caniff, Stan. Drake, Roy Crane, Walt Kelly, Monet, Ver Meer, Rembrandt, Gustav Klimt.
Favorite Writers: G.B. Shaw, Dickens, Joe Heller, Mark Twain.
Pastimes: (At various periods) Chess, music (composing), women, mountain climbing, skin diving, skiing, cabinet making, women, dancing.
Favorite Music: Mozart, Shostakovitch, Stravinsky, Puccini. Also Louis, Billie Holiday, Lunceford

"I was the golden haired young boy at King."

"FLASH GORDON"? What comic book is *he* in?" It's gone reverse; the things that are visible are the comic *books*.

RICK: *Well, the comic books had Stan Lee. Whatever you want to say about him, he was a great salesman for comic books.*

DAN: Yes, he was.

RICK: *And nobody's been* selling *the comic strips. They can't sell themselves —*

DAN: There are some faddist things that sell themselves, like GARFIELD.

RICK: *CALVIN AND HOBBES. Do you know CALVIN AND HOBBES?*

DAN: No. I hear it's a whole big cult thing but I don't know it.

RICK: *I wish I could lay out six CALVIN AND HOBBES and show*

DAN: The only newspaper I get around here is USA TODAY. The Atlanta paper is so bad — do you take it, Dave?

DAK: *No, you couldn't give it to me. (Laughter.)*

DAN: Me either — I feel the same way. It's very handy, once in awhile they send me a complimentary copy and it makes great kindling.

DAK: *It's a pathetic excuse for a paper.*

DAN: It's *incredible*. I had two guys from THE ATLANTA CONSTITUTION come out to interview me, and I *swear* neither of them was literate! It was embarrassing, they couldn't even use the tape recorder, and they misquoted, misunderstood.

DAK: *That's par for the newspaper*

RICK: *They probably have the slogan on their wall, "Originality Sells." (Laughter.)*

DAN: USA TODAY, its content is lacking, it's even more terse and hollow, but it's a pleasure to read because everything *looks* so well done. They have *terrific* artists, *wonderful* graphic artists.

GAIL BECKETT: You've got to find something useful or why bother? Nowadays toilet paper is the one paper product I don't care to give up. *(Laughter.)*

RICK: *What happened to the strips will happen to THE ATLANTA CONSTITUTION someday, because you can only give people nothing for so long. It may take ten years, twelve years, but eventually people will catch on. TARZAN was one of the most popular comic strips in the world, and then they turned it over to some really turgid writers, just unbelievably bad writers, and it still lasted some twenty years until it finally disappeared.*

DAN: Do you know who was writing it when I drew it?

RICK: *It was Edgar Rice Burroughs' brother-in-law, wasn't it?*

DAN: **Edgar Rice Burroughs** was writing it.

RICK: *No, it was his brother-in-law.*

DAN: I used to get letters from **Edgar Rice Burroughs** himself in person – complaining about my artwork, or that I'd changed a word here and there — come to think of it, I had the same problem with **Stan Lee.** *(Laughter.)*

RICK: *He may have been following it, but I'm pretty sure his brother-in-law was doing the actual writing.*

DAN: Maybe so, but **Edgar Rice Burroughs** was sitting on the strip, and he was over 80 then —

RICK: *He died while reading a Sunday paper. There's a lot of speculation about what comic strip killed Edgar Rice Burroughs. (Laughter.)*

DAN: Well, when I was doing the daily TARZAN strip, how that happened was that **Burne Hogarth** got the daily when they fired **Rex Maxon** for some reason. Rex was one of the artists I admired as a kid; he really was a good artist, but as he

Dan beating up on Dan (French Riviera, 1959). One disadvantage of working alone: Sometimes you have to play a double role!

"I used to get letters from Edgar Rice

got older his stuff got more and more rough. Maybe his eyes were going.

RICK: *Sketchier and sketchier, funny little lines that didn't go anywhere.*

DAN: It got just so bad. One of the most pathetic things I can remember — it really gave me a lump, it hurt so bad because this was a guy I had looked up to — I was at DC and **Rex Maxon** was there looking for work. When he left, these young editors and staff artists who had never heard of him were saying, "God, what crap. How did he ever do a strip?" In any case, Burne got the daily, but it took Burne a week to do his Sunday page, just as it took **Foster** about eight days to do his Sunday page. *(Laughter.)* He was *always* late. I mean, **Foster** could no more do what **Stan Drake** is now doing than I could skin an elephant.

GAIL: Stan's late about half the time.

DAN: Of *course* he's late, but look at the amount of *work* he's got. **Raymond** called me once to offer me a job, because they wanted a Sunday page for RIP KIRBY, and he said, "I can't handle them both" — and he wasn't even writing it! **Raymond** could not do it because he had only one assistant! *(Laughter.)* He wanted me to move and work with him. I was flattered! They had seen some of the books that I had done for advertising — I look back on them now and I'm ashamed of them — and yet I got calls from **Raymond**, from King Features, all offering me jobs. What the hell did they see in my work? It was well acted, but that doesn't help. I was still learning how to draw, this was in my early twenties.

I'd never studied anatomy, I'd studied painting. I studied with **Rafael Soyer** and he would come around the class about once a day and he'd say only one thing, "Make it more definite." That's all I ever heard from the guy! *(Laughter.)* I never learned anything. I learned how to size a painting, I learned how to use the old hide glue, I learned how to make a beautiful frame, but when it came to actually painting — "Make it more definite." So, I learned how to draw from comics, the same way **Jerry Robinson** did. What Jerry failed to mention in his interview in your magazine . . . well, first of all, his taking credit for **Meskin's** work tickles me.

Mort Meskin had a terrible stuttering problem. I shared an office with him and **Mac Raboy** once for a short time, and Jerry would come in, Mort would ink some of the figures and Jerry would finish it up and slick up the blacks, and then Jerry would bring in the work to DC. Strange. Mort was an idol to many of us. But I heard stories. **Mort Weisinger** would shout at him like a kid. And **Meskin**, of course, could not cope. In my view, but for that social problem, Mort would have been another **Caniff**. He was basically a better artist than **Caniff**. What Mort could do with a figure! He took what **Simon & Kirby** did — **Kirby** did it the easy way; if a muscle wouldn't move that way, he invented one that did! *(Laughter.)* But it looked right, right?

I tried to swipe **Simon & Kirby** but I couldn't, because I'd get to a point where I'd say, "Huh, it doesn't work, where do I put the leg?" *(Laughter.)* Well, Mort could get the leg. **Mort Meskin,** if I may, was **Jack Kirby** in poetry. He was a soft **Jack Kirby.** His compositions were unbelievable. When you saw his pencils, you just stood back and felt humbled, they were just *incredible.* He could take *any* situation, *any* number of figures, *any* action, and turn it into a classic, poetic, beautiful composition. Mort was one of the true giants of comics.

And Stan, what **Drake** has, he can do expressions that are just unbelievable! And the action shots, girls walking, girls undressing! *(Laughter.)* And the fight scenes, incredibly *difficult* positions to draw! When he has a guy leaning on his

ON A COLD WINTER NIGHT A ROCKET BLASTS UPWARD INTO THE OHIO SKIES, BLOWING OFF RED CLOUDS OF FIRE. EXPEDITION X-3 IS LAUNCHED FOR JUPITER!
TAKE A GOOD LOOK, SON! WE MAY NEVER SEE THAT SHIP AGAIN!
1000 MILES FROM EARTH ROTATES THE DREAD PRISON OF SPACE, PEOPLED BY PRISONERS TOO DESPERATE TO BE TRUSTED ON EARTH! IT IS HERE THAT FLASH GORDON'S ROCKET MUST MAKE AN EMERGENCY LANDING!
OPEN THE LANDING HATCH! FLIGHT X-3 IS COMING IN!

Burroughs complaining about my artwork."

elbow, he's leaning on his elbow. Most of us *construct* figures. You know, I *construct* a figure of a man leaning on his elbow, and it's a *drawn* figure. *Raymond* would do it the same way, this admirably *drawn* figure. With Stan you're totally unaware of the drawing anymore — that figure is just leaning like nobody else ever did it, like nobody *dared* do it because the foreshortening is so awkward in nature that you have to change it. Stan doesn't have to change it.

Stan often does the impossible and makes it look easy. And more than that, his *acting* — he is himself a ham, and a great personality, a *lovable* guy — and it shows in his work. His acting is incredible. When I looked at KELLY GREEN, I was flabbergasted, because here was a contemporary film in a comic book.

RICK: *Yes, it's very much like a film.*

DAN: We've all tried to do that, but I don't know anyone that has succeeded to this extent.

RICK: *I wouldn't take it as a compliment that it's very much like a contemporary film, because most contemporary films are very boring.*

DAN: Well I'm thinking of —

RICK: *KELLY GREEN was extremely well drawn —*

DAN: Look at what he was illustrating

RICK: *But didn't have anything wonderful happening in it.*

JULIA MATHER: *It was very European, which is not big in the American market. It was much more successful in Europe.*

RICK: *And to go from that to BLONDIE, you fall over staggered.*

DAN: It is just absolutely staggering.

Two days worth of Dan's FLASH GORDON: 11/19, 21/51 (note the early Wood/Kirby style).

ALTITUDE... 200 MILES! READY FOR THE SECOND ROCKET BOOSTER... BLAST!
CHECK... HEY! FLASH - I THINK SHE'S JAMMED! THE ROCKET WON'T FIRE!
WHAT!? BUT WE DON'T HAVE ENOUGH ACCELERATION TO GET INTO FREE SPACE!
WE'LL HAVE TO LAND AT AN EMERGENCY SPACE STATION.'
DAN BARRY 11-19
THAT'S BETTER THAN DRIFTING OUT HERE! WHICH IS THE NEAREST ONE?
UH-OH! YOU WON'T LIKE THIS, FLASH! THE ONLY STATION WITHIN SAFE DISTANCE IS... THE SPACE PRISON STATION!
OKAY, YOU CONS! GET MOVING... EVERYONE TO HIS CELL... A SHIP'S COMING IN!
YAAA... WHAT'SA MATTER, GUMSHOE? AFRAID WE MIGHT WANNA GO ON A SIGHTSEEING TOUR TO THE MOON?
THE MOON, MY NECK! THE CHARACTERS IN THAT ROCKET ARE WORSE OFF THAN WE ARE! AIN'T CHA HEARD? THAT'S FLIGHT X-3!
Y-YA MEAN... EXPEDITION X-3 ...TO JUPITER?!

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"Charlie Biro had a bulletproof car."

SEE, KING LUCIFAN! THEY ARE POUNDING AWAY OUR WALLS WITH THOSE INFERNAL MACHINES! SOON WE ARE LOST!
BOOM
I SEE THEY HAVE FOREIGN LEADERS! FRIENDS OF MARLA, NO DOUBT... HMMM!
HERE ARE THE KEYS! BRING THE BEAUTIFUL MARLA FORTH FROM WHERE SHE IS LOCKED! WE SHALL USE HER AS A HOSTAGE!
HO! MARLA'S LITTLE ANIMAL... THE WIZARD... HAS STOLEN THE KEYS! STOP HIM!
CATCH THAT WIZARD!
HE RUNS LIKE QUICKSILVER!
HE GOES TO MARLA'S ROOM!
WE'RE TOO LATE!
SHE HAS THE KEYS!
MARLA IS SLIPPING OUT THAT BACK DOOR!
SLAM
THERE HE GOES! OOH!
GET HIM!
AHA!
NOW, YOU LITTLE IMP! WE DON'T HAVE MARLA, BUT YOU'LL DO JUST AS WELL!

Three days worth of Jack "MAD" Davis: "That little wizard in the first panel of the (10/4/52) strip, its face is touching the borderline, and that's a (design) no-no."

Stan, I'm convinced, could take over FLASH GORDON tomorrow and do something *astonishing* with it, something that nobody thought could be done. I'm sure of that. I remember the first JULIET JONES that I saw, it was launched just months after my FLASH and I was sort of the golden-haired boy at King, and when I first looked at it I thought it was **Lou Fine**. It had that incredibly solid drawing of **Lou Fine's**. It was a shot of a couple of gals being pulled over to the side of the road by a motorcycle cop, the realism, looseness, elegance were just staggering.

As he went along it got even better. His mastery of handling a gal, I mean, women are hard to draw, loose and animated, relaxed. The only artist who had ever done that successfully was that MODESTY BLAISE guy in England.

RICK: *Now, several artists have handled the strip, do you mean Jim Holdaway?*

DAN: Yes.

RICK: *His work was beautiful.*

DAN: And Stan was of that standard.

RICK: *Before he did MODESTY he did ROMEO BROWN — have you ever seen ROMEO BROWN?*

DAN: Oh, yeah.

RICK: *Beautiful stuff, absolutely gorgeous work.*

DAN: Yeah. He came out of the classic English school of illustration. They had their years of anatomy and solid academic training. It shows.

DAK: *I want to jump back to something you said a little while ago. You said you weren't getting what you needed from art class and you were looking at the comics to learn how to draw. Did you plan to get into comics? How did you end up in comics? And were you after getting a syndicated strip? Did you have a direction or did it happen?*

DAN: I got into comics when I was about eighteen or nineteen. I had graduated high school very early — very precocious, I hadn't yet reached sixteen — and back in those days you couldn't go to college if you were just sixteen. You didn't go to college, period. I mean, if I went to college it would have been CCNY because I lived in Brooklyn and CCNY was a free college. So, I was doing nothing, just odd jobs, shining shoes and stuff like that, to pay for art school, and hanging around on the corner pitching pennies. Then I met, through **Joe Heller** (the CATCH-22 author — he belonged to our social club —)

DAK: *You knew everybody.*

DAN: Well, a lot of people came out of our social club, the neighborhood in Coney Island, a lot of very accomplished people. Who was it that wrote SWEET

"Simon & Kirby were making big dollars — and

CHARITY? Oh yes — **Sy Coleman.** DAMN YANKEES, SWEET CHARITY. We all came out of this real slum neighborhood. We used to play roller hockey in the streets with complete impunity, because no one in the neighborhood owned a car. I never *sat* in a car until I was about eighteen. Poverty today? Kids playing with their computer games and they're on welfare! I never knew anyone that owned a bicycle. You *rented* a bicycle when you wanted one.

Anyway, this guy comes along driving a Cadillac. **George Mandel.** He was doing comic books! He was at best a good, journeyman comic book artist. When I went for my first job interview with **Jack Kirby** and **Joe Simon,** I told them that I had been trained by **George Mandel** — I was in awe of his work — and they said, "Wish you hadn't said that." *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *And you met him through Joe Heller?*

DAN: Yes. I had seen him around, a little bit of a guy, very very bright. He, too, later became a novelist. The back of his head got blown away in World War II and he couldn't see clearly. So his days as an artist were finished. He turned to writing, wrote a couple of good novels. He never made a big success of it, but he was a very very good writer. Anyway, someone said, "You ought to meet this guy **Mandel**. You can draw, you can write." I was then working as a stagehand at the People's Theater Group, which was then what I thought I wanted to do — I didn't know what I wanted to do.

In high school I had been the editor of the newspaper and done some cartoons, and actually art was my weakest thing. I was not in the top strata of my art class, guys like **Fred Kida** were, and I really didn't think I could make it. But George had agreed to let me come over — he had moved out of the neighborhood for somewhere nearby — and I was too broke to even go over there, he used to give me car fare. I'd go over and just sit around and watch him work. I'd bring him some of my things and he'd make suggestions. He had an older brother — not much of an artist — whom he had trained to do his inking. He modified his own style so his brother could ink them. I would bring my work in and Allen would say, "Oh, the eyes are too close." — this guy who couldn't draw — and George would say, "I see something in it." The same thing, everybody *saw* something in my work. I didn't see it. I'd look at it and say, "But the head's twisted, this is wrong here," like that. George liked it, and he said, "But you really need some polishing." It was damn nice. I couldn't do that now, with my deadlines, what he did for me.

I took a job that summer as a lifeguard, a place called Totem Lodge, and they would bring legitimate theater in, as well as the headliners like **Milton Berle,** so part of my job was to run the stage. And dance, because there were always more women there than men, so I had to be there every night to dance with the ladies. *(Laughter.)* For this I got $50 for the summer — the whole summer, four months. But I had a workshop

THIS COULD BE IT! INTERFERON! IT KNOCKED OUT THE VIRUS IN THE LAB ANIMALS!
HURRY!
DAN BARRY 7/64
WELL, DOCTOR...?
THE INTERFERON WORKED? THE FEVER IS GOING DOWN!

First clinical use of interferon is shown in 1960 *Flash Gordon* comic strip

behind the stage, and I would sneak off and make up samples. It was the first time I had a studio! I came from a family of seven kids, there was no place in my house where I could sit and draw. So, at the end of the summer I had a bunch of samples, very crude, and I brought them to George. He said, "I think they're good enough to go around looking for some work," and he gave me names of people to call. One of them was **Simon & Kirby.** They had a studio then in Tudor City, very lovely — you know Tudor City?

JULIA: *No.*

DAN: Well, it's on the East River at the end of 42nd Street, and it was a private enclave of buildings, of apartment buildings, something like the Dakota with a gate that you entered and a security guard. It was big stuff! These guys were making big money for those days. My dad was a painting contractor, he was probably bringing home $40 a week and supporting seven kids. And these guys, even at $10 and $12 a page, were making big dollars — and they were like Hollywood characters, bigger than life. **Charlie Biro** had a bulletproof car. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *Did he have that many enemies?*

DAN: If he didn't have them, he would make them. *(Laughter.)* **Charlie Biro** was about 6'5", weighed maybe 300 pounds, a big Hungarian hunk, and he heard that I used to box as a kid, so he comes over at an office party, starts punching me, and says, "Come on, show me if you can box!" I came up to his waist you know. *(Laughter.)* He *made* enemies. Charlie once — I'm deviating, but I'll get back — Charlie once called me in, during those depression years when nobody could get work, even **Meskin** couldn't get work — and I got so many scripts that I gave Mort work. I couldn't shine Mort's shoes as an artist, but I was getting work for him. Anyway, Charlie offered me work if I would work at a reduced rate — the going rate was $35 then, so he offered me $25 with the promise that "when we make it big, you're going to cash in." What a crock. The moment he made it big — do you remember a magazine he came out with, he called it TOPS. It was going to be a slick magazine — it was something like **All** calling himself the greatest. The moment he got to that status, where he was paying $100 a page, he called in all of the big names. I got two pages at the back of the book. So much for promises.

At any rate, he called me in one day, he didn't like my women. He said, "I like your stories, I like the *intensity,* but these women are lousy." You know, they

they were like Hollywood characters, bigger than life."

FLASH GORDON
BY- ALEX RAYMOND
DALE IS BRINGING FOOD WHICH HER FELLOW SLAVE, KHAN, HAS POISONED--SEEING FLASH AT THE TABLE, AND NOT WISHING TO POISON HIM, SHE TRIPS HERSELF---
INSTANTLY, THE GUARD WOMAN IS OVER DALE, CUTTING VICIOUSLY WITH HER CRUEL WHIP---
DON'T BEAT THE GIRL--SHE COULDN'T HELP TRIPPING!
HO, GUARD! BRING SLEEP GAS!
BEFORE THE GUARD CAN BRING HIS GAS-GUN INTO USE, FLASH DROPS HIM WITH THE FLAT OF HIS SWORD---
ARE WE TO BE FRIENDS OR ENEMIES, AZURA?
FRIENDS, FLASH--I'M SORRY I LOST MY TEMPER---

An example of Alex Raymond's draftsmanship for FLASH GORDON.

weren't **Caniff,** they weren't great — but they weren't bad, no worse than the others he had working for him. **Hubbell,** remember **Hubbell?** So I said, "Well, what kind of women do you like?" And I used the same approach I've always used. "This is me. You know, I'm good at some things, I'm not good at others. You like my work, you buy it. You don't like it, don't criticize it, fire me." This is the way I've always dealt with editors. I've got a reputation for being a hard ass and short tempered. Bullshit. I just knew I could not be **Jack Kirby** — I tried — I could not be **Caniff,** I could not be **Raymond.** This is the way I draw and you either like it or you don't like it.

You know, I'll make a reasonable change, but change my women? I said, "Whom would you like me to model my women after?" He said, "Well, **Caniff's** are dolls. Women don't look like that, they're just cartoons, that wouldn't go in our stuff." (It's okay for **Caniff** but it isn't good enough for **Charlie Biro.**) *(Laughter.)* I said, "Well, how about **Alex Raymond?**" "Oh, **Raymond's** women are all photographic. They're phony, they're cold, they don't act, they don't have any emotions." "**Foster?**" "**Foster's** women

"Jack Kirby never said a word – the machine, it just went."

are old-fashioned." *(Laughter.)* So I said, "Well, who's left?" Charlie sat back, this great big bear of a guy, he kind of blushed and I knew just what he was going to say, and he tapped his pencil on his desk and he said, "Well, to tell you the truth, the only one I can think of is me." *(Laughter.)* And this guy couldn't draw! This guy came out of the Disney Studios, but he was the worst artist I've ever seen who was successful. His stuff was successful because, like **Stan Lee**, he had the same mentality as the readers that he wrote for.

RICK: *Like one of his own wise guys, in other words.*

DAN: Yeah. He took over DARE-DEVIL, which was a nothing strip, and made it a tremendous success with those little wise guys. He created this boy character with a monkey on his shoulder, I forget his name, Crimebuster or Ghostbuster or something, and it was a very popular and good strip. I had the misfortune of collaborating with him on the creation of AIRBOY magazine, the whole magazine.

RICK: *He was like Stan Lee in that his characters, these little kids, these little wise guys, acted like little kids, they didn't act like Superboy or Bomba the Jungle Boy.*

DAN: **Charlie Biro** was the kind of guy who would drive into a neighborhood, park this huge limousine of his, and call some kids over and say, "Hey, you know who I am?" *(Laughter.)* "I'm **Charlie Biro!**" And they'd say, "Who?" And then he'd sit around and rap with these kids, sign autographs and so on —

RICK: *And pick up how they talked, learn their slang?*

DAN: Maybe that's how he did it. But the point is Charlie really *thought* that he was great, and his women were the greatest women going.

Anyway, to get back to the start, I had an interview with **Simon & Kirby**, they had five guys on their staff, and they gave me a page to ink. That's what they did, "Here, sit down, ink this page." My hand was shaking like a leaf! A **Jack Kirby** original, this was going to be in a comic book, this was actually going to be printed, and they're trying me out on this? I'd never done anything — the typical amateur syndrome, everything you do is just practice, it's just a sample. They gave me one of Jack's pages, and it was awesome!

Joe Simon had a *terrible* reputation around the business, and any time I visited them I only saw Joe walking around the room, patting people on the back. And Jack was sitting there with a cigar, never said a word; the machine, it just went. So I thought Joe was the writer, but it turned out that Jack was also the writer. I thought Joe was the inker who invented this style of blobbing in blacks where they don't exist but they look good, but that was Jack, too. I

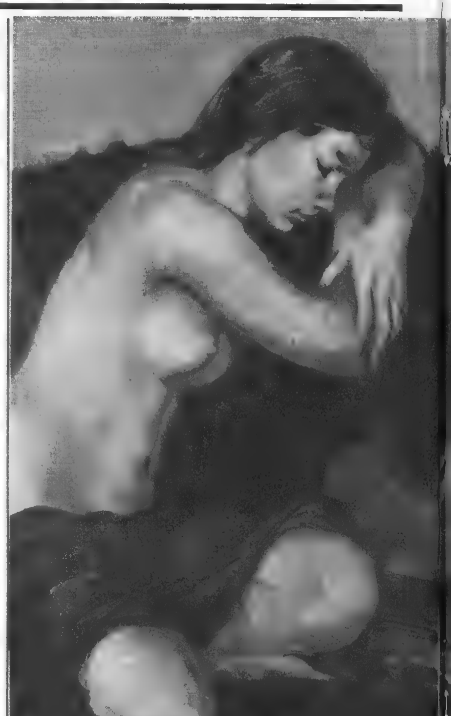


Figure painting by Dan — from the Cleveland Museum of Art.

"I never figured out what Joe Simon did."

© Dan Barry

never to this day have figured out what Joe did — he must have been the businessman. Jack never did as well after they split.

I mean, you waited for the new Simon & Kirby book the way you waited for a new **Charlie Chaplin** movie — it was an *event!* I remember when they moved to DC, it was staggering! Every cartoonist was saying, "What are they gonna do? They dropped CAPTAIN AMERICA, how can they follow that act? They'll never do anything as good as that again!" Along comes BOY COMMANDOS - *Whew!* The first cover just *jumped* out of the newsstand; they came right out of the cover, these little guys, it was terrific.

DAK: *So, even though this was a depressed time, they were living much better than the average person?*

DAN: Oh, God, yeah. At least their office, from my standards — could never afford an office like that — and their staff. But Jack was doing all of the pencilling. He kept five inkers busy, and colorers I guess — just incredible. Joe very graciously gave me the name of an editor at Fawcett to go to see, and this editor sent me out to New Jersey to work for **Jack Binder** and Otto **Binder**. Otto **Binder** was the #1 grind-'em-out writing machine at DC. They both later were suspected, I understand, along with the guy who sent me to see them, as members of the German American Bund!

RICK: *Were they doing anything or was this just one of those —*

DAN: I don't really know. I heard they were members of the German American Bund. Every Sunday they put on their uniforms and went marching. I lived in Coney Island, which is the tip end of Brooklyn, which is an hour subway ride to Times Square — and in those days there were three separate subway systems, the BMT, the IRT, and the IND, and you paid a separate fare for each so. I had a trolley ride, I had a BMT ride to Times Square, then an IRT ride up to Washington Bridge, and then a bus ride to Tenafly, New Jersey; two-and-a-half hours, on a good day when I made connections. So I would sneak pages, because you weren't allowed to take work home, and you got a dollar a page for every activity

DAK: *This was with the Binders?*

DAN: Yes. I met **Andre LaBlanc** there, we had an immediate rapport — in fact **Andre LaBlanc** was the inspiration for the mizard. He had a character that he did when he lived in South America similar to the mizard but not quite, a little creature that was pure fantasy, and I always remembered that and thought that was a great idea. So, I worked for Jack for awhile, and about the fifth week he called me in and scolded me because I'd made too much money for my talent. *(Laughter.)* That's the way he put it.

"I drew all the high jump bars ($1) and then inked the bars."

What was happening was I was sneaking pages home, doing them on the subway.

And also I realized, you know, these guys around me — Andre could *draw*, he had a classic art school background and anatomy — I felt very inferior to a lot of these guys. I was the youngest kid there, they were all several years older than I. But I had a determination, I was going to make it. Then I got fired because I learned my way around, to get around my shortcomings and things I couldn't do. For instance, they had a book they were doing - **Binder** would package these books and then hire a staff for them —

DAK: *Were they still packaging CAPTAIN MARVEL at that time?*

DAN: Yes, CAPTAIN MARVEL and SPY SMASHER and CAPTAIN MIDNIGHT. What was *fun* for me was one day I wound up at Fawcett and took both CAPTAIN MIDNIGHT and SPY SMASHER away from **Binder.** The good guy finally won! *(Laughter.)* When I heard what he was *getting* — he was getting $20 a page when $15 to $18 was a good rate, but he was only paying $5 out!

RICK: *And he was just the middleman.*

DAN: Oh, and he was running the place like Adolph, you know. "At twelve o'clock we shtop vork und ephrybodty goes outsite und plays baseball!" *(Laughter.)* My attitude was screw it, I'll hide in the shadows and draw another page! *(Laughter.)* I mean, five hours of travel, I've got to make up for it. Well, in short, he had a story about the athlete who broke the pole vault record that year, it was like a 20-page story so there were pages and pages of nothing but a figure vaulting a crossbar. I grabbed about ten of these pages and I drew all the high jump bars ($1) and then *inked* all of the bars. So I got $2 a page for backgrounds. I did about ten pages in the time it would take me to do one page of figures. So, little things like that helped. I went home one week with $150.

JULIA: *Sounds like you at Marvel, Dave.*

RICK: *So, you took SPY SMASHER away from Binder and you started doing it for Fawcett yourself?*

DAN: Later on I was working for Fawcett and I was doing CAPTAIN MIDNIGHT, which was something **Binder** used to do. Again, I came in one day. **Mac Raboy** was doing CAPTAIN MARVEL JR. — Oh, God, this was stuff so far *above* the rest of us in the comics field; again, you waited every month for it because it was an *event!*

RICK: *Some of his covers were absolutely stunning.*

DAN: He would work on one panel for a *week.* When I finally got to the point where I was working with him, Mac would come in — he was building a house out in Croton Falls, building it *himself,* and he couldn't work at home, and he had to get away from the kids. So he would come into the office about once or twice a week, just to finish up these FLASH GORDON Sunday pages. God, I was in awe! I mean, the guy's doing a syndicated strip, and I'd watch him do a head, and no wonder his drawings were perfect in the early days — later on when he was dying of cancer, the pain was coming out in his work —

RICK: *But he drew such beautiful work for these scripts that were so wretched. (Laughter.)*

DAN: It was a shame. Well, they started shrinking the Sunday page on him, and all of his figures started to hunch over. *(Laughter.)* It was so strange. I'll show you what *I'm* drawing to get the illusion of a full figure; I'll put Flash in the foreground from the chest up and then way off in the background have some tiny figures. The bloody panels are so *small* now, but you want to make it look like a figure, right, give it that *illusion* of height.

RICK: *And Mort Walker and the NCS, who should have protested this new smaller size, they went right along with it!*

DAN: What the hell did he care, it's less work. That was what a lot of them said, it's less work. Really, they said, "It makes my work go fast."

RICK: *But it's going to get so small that nobody wants to read it anymore, and that's going to be less work, too, because everybody's going to be out of a job.*

GAIL: But when you think about it, most of the cartoons are done the way GARFIELD is.

DAN: Well, I could always work for David, here, on some books — he can afford me. *(Laughter.)*

RICK: *FLASH GORDON lost the half-page, I don't think it exists in a half-page anywhere anymore.*

DAN: I think it's a fourth-page everywhere now.

RICK: *It's still a third-page here and there.*

DAN: On my Sunday page I have always had — there are two formats, and I'm obviously lower echelon format, where they're done in two lines. When Mac was doing it —

RICK: *Yeah, he had these six big big panels, boom boom boom, and you could really do something in that kind of space.*

DAN: It was a three-line format divided into two. In other words, he was given the same *space* as a three-line, but he had the option of doing it in two lines, and he took that option.

For Mac the smaller size was impossible. His compositions got circular. Everything was curved, cramped. His background was as a woodcut artist. Way back when Mac first started working for **Iger & Eisner,** he allready had *woodcuts* in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. What a comedown that must have been for him, to have to do comics. He was in his twenties and he had stuff in the Met! That's unheard of! He was a *fine*

"Some newspapers take the Sundays and not the daily."

woodcut artist. Really, if he had stayed with that all of his life, he would have been a major graphic man like **Leonard Baskin** or the like. An American master.

RICK: *And when they cut down the format, the whole life went out of the strip.*

DAN: On my format, the first panel of each line is disposable; I have two "drop panels." I have to write two panels which are not essential to continuity.

RICK: *Whoever had that brilliant idea right after World War II that you could take a work of art, a work of entertainment, and chop it up like a piece of pie, leave some pieces out, and still have it entertain, just must not have understood what reading a comic strip was all about. It makes a big difference.*

DAN: Well, remember, in addition to that problem, I do *two* different stories. The daily story and the Sunday story are different, because some newspapers take the Sunday and not the daily, and others just the daily. Mind you, I don't plot my stuff ahead, so I'm *always* working on that old HAIRBREADTH HARRY principle where the lions are coming from one side and the cannibals are coming from the other side. *(Laughter.)* I leave myself in the middle of a situation and I don't know how I'm going to get out, so sometimes I'll pace the floor and stare at it all day.

RICK: *I remember in a recent Sunday strip you had Flash and the girl fall off a cliff, so in the next Sunday they're still falling, and for the whole eight panels they're still falling. (Laughter.) Flash is going to catch the girl and drag her into an upward air current, and the girl says, "Get your hands off me, you lowborn something." Flash says to hell with it and just lets her fall. (Laughter.) I thought that was very funny.*

DAN: That was my fourth wife.

NEXT: Morts, Weisinger and Meskin . . . the comics career of Mike Hammer's Mickey Spillane . . . and much, much more on the Golden Age of Comics.

FLASH GORDON Sunday page from 1948. Pencils and inks are by the late, great Mac Raboy

"Comics should be used in schools as a teaching aid."

GENE SIMMONS

Did you ever hear of a comics fanzine called MEN OF MYSTERY? I didn't think so. Back in comic fandom's prehistoric era, the early to mid-60's, when copies of FANTASTIC FOUR #1 were selling for about $10, dozens of comics fans were publishing their own fanzines on mom and dad's office ditto mimeograph machines (never mind what mimeograph is . . . or was).

Anyway, I was one of those young teen-agers who was so enthralled to discover other comics fans my age who were turning their hobby into publishing enterprises that I took a stab at it, creating MEN OF MYSTERY in the process. I published four issues between 1964 and 1967, the most popular of which, #4, actually had a print run of 200 copies, advertised and sold out through ads in other fanzines. It was a small and select group that read M.O.M., and an even more select group of people who contributed articles to it

Flash forward 25 years (gulp!) to 1989. I'm at RCA's post-Grammys party in Beverly Hills, when RCA promotion rep Hugh Surratt (himself a longtime comics fanzine contributor) introduces me to Gene Simmons. That's Gene Simmons of Kiss fame (you know, the one with the foot-long tongue you wish you had . . .

KISS 1984. (L-R) Bruce Kulick, Paul Stanley, GENE SIMMONS, and Eric Carr.

All text accompanying this interview is © 1989 Illanye Entertainment Group, Inc., unless otherwise noted

"I taught sixth grade in Spanish Harlem."

or at least your girlfriend or wife does . . .). I don't know Gene from Adam (Strange, that is), or so I thought, but as we shake hands, he says, "Oh, Jeff Gelb. Aren't you from Rochester, New York?" Bewildered, I nod. Then he floors me: "Didn't you publish a comics fanzine back in the 60's?" At this point, I figure Hugh had put Gene up to this, but one glance at Hugh shows his mouth on the floor in astonishment.

"You don't know this," Gene continues, "but back in the '60s, I used to write columns for your fanzine under the name Gene Klein."

Talk about your small worlds. This world was so small that Atom would have a hard time shrinking into it. Well, Gene continues to regale me with a downright spooky photographic memory of those halcyon days, when he too published fanzines like COSMOS STILETTO, and read every comic book under the sun.

Never one to let a good story get away, I get Gene to agree to a nostalgic bull session a few days later. He forces me to come to his Beverly Hills mansion, where his significant other, Shannon Tweed, serves us salads by the pool, whilst we while away a perfect southern California afternoon recalling the good old days, when all things seemed possible . . . even

"I came from Israel . . . when I came here I couldn't

10-cent comic books.
Care to hasen in?

JEFF GELB: *First of all, Gene, do you have a photographic memory? I couldn't believe it when you walked up to me that night and not only knew me but remembered that I had a partner and on and on.*

GENE SIMMONS: *(Laughter.)* I don't think that it's an actual photographic memory, but pretty close. Certain bits of information just *stick*, I don't know why.

JEFF: *The minutiae, the little stuff?*

GENE: No, the big stuff, too; for instance, addresses of people I haven't seen nor heard of in 25 years, 30 years.

JEFF: *That's what happened with us. I mean, why should any of that stuff stick after 25 years? It's amazing.*

GENE: I even remembered your street address after awhile, I don't know why. And I remember almost every single fanzine and what's *in* them, for some reason. *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *So, when did you start collecting?*

GENE: I came from Israel in 1958, I was eight years old. When I first came here I couldn't *believe* that there was such a thing as a television set, because I had never seen a television set before, and then television was really my introduction to the world of fantasy and all of that. All of a sudden I saw this guy in a cape, he's flying through the air, and I didn't know *what* the hell this was! I couldn't understand a word of what was being said. Then I started watching the Mickey Mouse cartoons, THE MOUSEKETEERS and all of that, but that didn't appeal to me — but as soon as I saw Daffy Duck and Bugs Bunny, I fell in love. I couldn't understand what was going on — everybody was being beaten up, and everybody seemed *happy! (Laughter.)* That seemed as warped as I had ever imagined anything to be.

JEFF: *So, you didn't speak English yet when you came over?*

GENE: No, not a word. But *then* I picked up my first comic books, SUPERMAN, BATMAN — the **Bob Kane** BATMANs and the **Curt Swan** SUPERMANs. There was another guy who was just great, my *favorite* SUPERMAN artist, he really only ever drew one very *thick* Superman, **Wayne Boring**. Thick! You know, when I think of a man *that's* what I think of, instead of like these skinny guys with **Christopher Reeves** sort of bodies. **Wayne Boring** drew a *thick* Superman, almost like a wrestler, almost like **Bruno Sammartino** as Superman. In fact one of the early fanzines I published had a **Wayne Boring** original of Superman that was never used — it was TINDERBOX.

Centerfold from Marvel's KISS comic, by Alan Weiss & Al Milgrom. This illustration also appeared in the N.Y. Times Magazine.

So anyway, to make a long story short, once I started reading comic books the whole world opened up for me. And then I became *fanatical* about comic books, collected every single one, *every* character that ever came out, like Tommy Tomorrow.

JEFF: *Were you specifically a DC fan?*

GENE: Well, there was no such thing as Marvel, it was Atlas in those days. I missed AMAZING FANTASY when it came out. I got sick or something laid in bed for a couple of months, and my mother went out and started buying comic books for me — you know, to keep me busy. And I always did well in school, it wasn't a question of not doing well in school and just reading comic books — I did well in school *and* loved comic books. And then I started reading FANTASTIC FOUR when it first came out.

I . . . you know, I'm wrong, I *did* have . . . SPIDER-MAN #1 had the cover with the Fantastic Four, that's what I had — I had missed those first FANTASTIC FOURs and the first Spider-Man in AMAZING FANTASY. But from then

believe that there was such a thing as television."

on I was *hooked* I didn't know what was going on, but I just *worshipped* those books, the artwork, especially **Kirby**! When **Kirby** would have somebody *punch* somebody, the fact that they flew out of the panels was *beyond* anything I could imagine. *(Laughter.)* And then I discovered STRANGE TALES and TALES TO ASTONISH, the sort of horror thing, and I always loved that as well. I just became a fanatic! And at the same time I was also a horror fan, I was reading FAMOUS MONSTERS OF FILMLAND and all of that stuff.

JEFF: *You and me both.*

GENE: It's a shame there are no more candy stores. That's a real social phenomenon that stopped, and that's a big shame. I remember on Tuesdays and Thursdays — there were different days in the neighborhoods — I would *run* across the street, weaving in and out of traffic. The rest of the time I crossed at the green lights, but I just couldn't *wait* to get to the store, I'd have about $1.50 in my hand and buy ten books. *Oh!*

JEFF: *Or fifteen books, when they were a dime.*

GENE: Yeah, but then they became twelve cents, I was *furious* at that. *(Laughter.)* When they were ten cents I bought *everything.*

JEFF: *It's funny because it's so easy to buy comic books now, there are probably fifteen comic-book stores in Los Angeles alone, but when we were kids you used to have to go to three or four stores just to make sure you found everything.*

GENE: That's right, because different books would appear in different places, and not all appeared.

JEFF: *I remember specifically where I bought FLY #1, it was this little hole-in-the-wall deli/grocery store, and nobody else even carried it. I came upon it by accident and went, "What's this?" That was such a frustrating part of it at the time, not knowing what you would be missing.*

GENE: And I remember one company put out THE THREE ROCKETEERS, which were reprints —

JEFF: *That was Harvey.*

GENE: Yeah. That was a terrific book, it was a **Kirby** thing, and there was an **Al Williamson** script in there.

JEFF: *You talked about that in one of the columns in my fanzine MEN OF MYSTERY.*

GENE: I did? *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *(To recorder.)* We're talking *obscure* books here.

GENE: THE THREE ROCKETEERS was a **Kirby** . . . it must have been just a one-shot, and it must have been just a *trial* one-shot in one of the books, I couldn't tell you which larger book it appeared in, I guess around when DC reprinted the **Kirby** CHALLENGERS OF THE UNKNOWN.

JEFF: *Great books.*

GENE: Lovely, that was a fantastic book without super powers.

JEFF: *What did your parents think of all this, did they give you a hard time?*

GENE: No, except one year I came back with bad marks and then all of the comic books were thrown out — everything, right down the incinerator. And then the following year I scored, found some stuff in somebody's attic, turned around and sold them and came home with a couple of hundred bucks, which in those days was a lot of money, it was a month's wages. My mother couldn't understand it, so I explained it to her, brought out ROCKET'S BLAST*COMIC COLLECTOR and showed her some of the prices and so on.

JEFF: *And she never threw your books away again.*

GENE: Never again. And then finally, when we had our own comic book, she said, "How could I have done that!" *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *The guilt factor.*

GENE: Yeah, she finally saw . . . She never understood why I loved horror movies and Hammer films, **Christopher**

"I loved THUNDER AGENTS, Dynamo in particular."

Eat me! Dash Riehl!

JEFF: *It's hard to explain to people that don't automatically get it.*

GENE: Hey, look. I don't understand when people sit in front of television sets and watch people dressed alike running around trying to kick a ball that's not round. It's *beyond* me. People with numbers on their backs? Basketball? Football? It's beyond me, I don't get it. But there are people that do.

JEFF: *That's funny, because I think most people that are into comics — or at least it used to be — were not sports fans. I never was. But nowadays there's more crossover between comics and sports, in terms of interest. Well, one of the things I thought we might do, I'd like to refresh your memory, I'll give you the title of the company and you give me a quick impression of what you thought of them back then. ACG?*

GENE: I thought the most adventurous thing they did was Herbie Popnecker who has since gone on to review movies with —

JEFF: *Siskel, right!*

GENE: Right! *(Laughter.)* Doesn't Ebert look like Herbie Popnecker?

JEFF: *Absolutely.*

GENE: Exactly, the sweater, the whole thing. He doesn't *look* like it he *is* Herbie Popnecker! *(Laughter.)* ACG's problem, I thought, was that they had this one formula where they knew they were *safe* and would sell a certain number of copies. The artwork was, you know, **John Costanza** and all of those guys — this is strange. I haven't said *that* name in 30 years. *(Laughter.)* But I thought when they brought in **Chic Stone** to do some of the Nemesis things — you know, they tried to Marvelize it a bit — I didn't think they'd do a bad job. Nemesis was a good idea.

JEFF: *Yeah. What about the Archie Comics superheroes, did you collect them?*

GENE: Well, as soon as I became a **Kirby** fan, I hunted down THE SHIELD — and I *loved* it, it was a terrific book.

JEFF: *And he did the first issue of THE FLY as well.*

GENE: That's right, and I had that, with the robots and the little guy — terrific! **Kirby** had a knack, whether he wrote them or not, and the villains were *as* interesting, certainly, as the heroes. I thought JAGUAR was terrific, too, the whole idea with the serpent women and stuff. I didn't quite like THE JAGUAR *name* as much, it didn't quite have the *oomph*, but the costume I thought was great. An all red costume, it was *simple*, and that's what I liked most about it.

Al Williamson and Wally Wood collaborated on this T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS cover (#10).

JEFF: *Well, what did you think of Tower?*

GENE: I loved THUNDER AGENTS, Dynamo in particular — the *artwork*, the **Wally Wood** school. It wasn't always **Wally Wood**, it was **Dan Adkins** a lot of the time — **Dan Adkins** was his assistant, used to ink his stuff, and that's how he developed that style. And there were rumors that **Neal Adams** did some of the stuff over there. But anyway, the main point is the weak link there, I always thought, were the scripts. They just never went anywhere. It was very linear, you never found out what make them tick, it was just some nice panel graphics. It looked very much like the artists sat down, sketched, and then somebody came along and put the dialogue down and that's what is was. I don't know it for a fact, but I don't know that anybody ever actually sat down and wrote a script first and then broke it down, which real storytelling should be.

JEFF: *Absolutely true — but boy, they sure were nice to look at.*

GENE: They were beautiful.

JEFF: *Do you remember when Dell took a stab at some superheroes?*

GENE: Yeah. I collected every single comic company, had a different closet for

"[Steve] Ditko and [Gil] Kane didn't do anatomy that well."

each company. *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *Dell did all of the monsters as superheroes.*

GENE: Yeah. Which was the publisher that brought out the little bogus CAPTAIN MARVEL with **Carl Burgos**?

JEFF: *That's . . . M.F. or something.*

GENE: It was only for a couple of issues and then they were sued.

JEFF: *They sucked anyway, let's face it. (Laughter.)*

GENE: I thought Gold Key had an interesting run with DOCTOR SOLAR. It was an interesting idea. I thought as soon as that got started that, with Cyclops from Marvel, I thought somebody should sue somebody, because it was very close.

JEFF: *Yeah, it was, with the visor and all. Were you like me, one of those guys who just was dying to get the two companies, the two big companies, to do a book together?*

GENE: Marvel and DC, I *dreamt* about it! I used to dream about Superman and Spider-Man together. I used to dream about the Hulk fighting Superman and beating him. *(Laughter.)* Even though, by the laws of comic books you know —

JEFF: *It couldn't happen.*

GENE: No.

JEFF: *Did you read them when they actually did that?*

GENE: Sure.

JEFF: *So you have those.*

GENE: Nope, sold 'em.

JEFF: *Oh? Well, what kind of stuff have you actually retained in your collection?*

GENE: Very very selective. Some of the really early FANTASTIC FOURs, I've kept certain issues that I really like, when the Surfer first appeared, and the Inhumans, that was an interesting bunch.

JEFF: *Definitely a Marvel fan, it sounds like.*

GENE: Well, there were some DC things I liked too. I liked the Viking Prince. I liked early BATMANs the **Bob Kane** BATMANs, although I never thought they were drawn particularly well.

JEFF: *What about the Neal Adams BATMAN, did you like those?*

GENE: Yes, I did. I collected the entire run. And I had an entire GREEN LANTERN run, because I loved **Gil Kane**, and then I *loved* what **Neal Adams** did with GREEN LANTERN AND GREEN ARROW. And for awhile I was a JUSTICE LEAGUE fan.

JEFF: *Probably more for the idea rather than the execution, right?*

GENE: Yeah, because the artwork just never made it.

JEFF: *Mike Sekowsky is one of those guys where you either love or hate his work, and I was not one of his fans.*

GENE: He and **Dom Heck** just have like this . . . none of the artwork has any *weight* to it, and the anatomies were always sort of warped, especially **Mike Sekowsky's**. But having proper anatomy isn't everything, because when you think about it **Ditko** and **Kane** didn't do anatomy that well either, but you liked their work.

JEFF: *Right, because something worked. I think what I didn't like on Sekowsky's work was it just felt too cartoonsy to me, whereas Kane's seemed a little more classical.*

GENE: One of my least favorite artists of all time was **Jesse Marsh.**

JEFF: *Oh, I remember him.*

GENE: His Tarzan was . . . *ugh!*

JEFF: *Let's call that an acquired taste.*

GENE: And yet I loved TARZAN, I used to buy the books anyway.

JEFF: *Do you remember when Russ Manning took over TARZAN?*

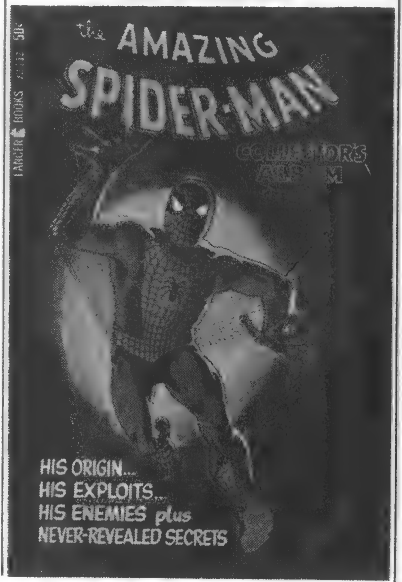
GENE: *Yes!*

JEFF: *That was a great run.*

GENE: It was a beautiful book. And I loved BROTHERS OF THE SPEAR, loved that, the whole idea. That was **Russ Manning.**

JEFF: *Yeah. And I think Joe Kubert did*

Steve Ditko's cover illustration from the mid-60s (paperback) Spider-Man collection — from LANCER BOOKS.



"And then it occurred to me, 'Gee,

© 1988 DC Comics

Gil Kane both pencilled & inked this artwork from GREEN LANTERN #51 (1967).

some TARZANs for awhile.

GENE: At DC, yes. I had a complete run of that as well.

JEFF: *And then somewhere along the way you got into fanzines.*

GENE: The first fanzine that I ever got was ROCKET'S BLAST*COMIC COLLECTOR, because it was mentioned in one of the pages of FANTASTIC FOUR. Right after that, about a month later, I started getting all the science fiction genzines, as they were called. I remember all of them, PHOTON and CINEFANTASTIQUE — which is still around, *that's* amazing — and all of that stuff. And then it occurred to me, "Gee, I should be doing this myself." So, along the way — I don't know why or how it happened — **Marvin Wolfman** and I got together and we were going to do a one-shot. I don't remember if we did anything together, we just met once, decided to start doing something, and then never heard from each other again.

JEFF: *Did you both live in Brooklyn at the time?*

GENE: No, I was living in Queens and he lived in Bayside someplace. I've got some of the fanzines here, that's COSMOS STILETTO.

JEFF: *This is one of yours, yeah.*

GENE: Oh, yeah. The guy that did this cover, Guy Dorsey, was very popular in the fan magazines.

JEFF: *Hey, he was good for his time — I'm looking at COSMOS STILETTO #9 from 1966. You actually got nine issues out?*

GENE: Eleven.

JEFF: *You were around for a while!*

GENE: I liked everything. This was a genzine, and we had a comic strip in there.

JEFF: *I was just looking at the contents page to see if there was anybody else that I recognize, and David Saurak sounds familiar. Were these all friends of yours from the New York area?*

GENE: No, I never met 'em *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *These were all people like you and me who just met through the mail. I have no idea how I got your name or how you got connected with my fanzine.*

GENE: Every fanzine I ever saw reviewed in anything, I'd send away for, I'd send money. I gave mine out free.

(Enter Shannon Tweed.)

JEFF: *Do you remember the guys, the two brothers, who used to buy four copies of every fanzine that came out, John and Tom McGeehan?*

GENE: Sure. They had their clearing house, it was called John and Tom McGeehan's Clearing House.

JEFF: *I remember them because they were my first clients, the first people that purchased MEN OF MYSTERY. Then somehow you got a copy of my magazine, and then you and I worked together. You were in two out of the four issues that I published of MEN OF MYSTERY.*

GENE: Yes.

JEFF: *Which was really wild. When I met you that night . . . I mean, I don't remember 25 years ago as well as you do, I had to go back home and look these things up to really discover that you had not only bought them but actually had written for them.*

GENE: And I typed my own stencil. *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *You probably did. I've got to show these to you, Shannon, 'cause*

I should be doing this myself.'"

they're really wild. This is his writing.

SHANNON TWEED: *(Laughter.)* Did you know **Gene Simmons** was **Gene Klein?**

JEFF: *No, not at all. He walked up to me at this Grammy party and said, "You don't know this, but I know you." (Laughter.)*

SHANNON: Gene is so funny.

GENE: And I had some artwork in there — didn't I draw one of the pieces of art? Yes, I did.

JEFF: *The last issue of MEN OF MYSTERY you did a column, it was your impressions of the field at the time, of all of the publishers who were out there, and it was so much fun to read what you were thinking about all of these guys. Frankly, I don't remember any of this stuff.*

GENE: I remember everything. I had a column in WEBSPINNER.

SHANNON: *(Looking at a 'zine.)* What's a *zyne?"*

GENE: *Zeen,* it's a 'zine.

SHANNON: Comic lingo! *(Laughter.) You stupid little boys!*

JEFF: *That's okay, that's what all the girls think.* (Laughter.) *Did you write these comic strips that were in here?*

GENE: No, these were written by my coeditors **Vince Mansfield** and **John Kusalovich,** who I since haven't seen. They published their own magazine called STILETTO, and I had one called COSMOS, so we merged.

JEFF: *The thing that's so strange that you have to understand about this, Shannon, is there's probably not 50 people in the world that ever saw these things. You'd have a circulation of about 25 and hand them out to your friends.*

GENE: I had about 170, 180.

SHANNON: I'm surprised you liked them, they're so bland looking.

GENE: But it was such *juicy* stuff. We wrote about the things we *cared* about.

JEFF: *The thing that was exciting was finding somebody else that actually cared about this stuff.*

GENE: The letter columns was where you'd go. We didn't kid around.

JEFF: *Better known as the lettercol.*

SHANNON: The *lettercol! (Laughter.)* Little boys' club lingo.

GENE: Everybody wrote in.

JEFF: *So, how long did you do this, for a couple of years?*

GENE: Well, actually almost straight through college, so at *least* six or seven years.

SHANNON: You guys decided to get together from that meeting at the Grammy party?

GENE: Yeah!

JEFF: *I had to talk to him about all of this. I don't know anybody else from those days anymore, except Howard Brenner because he still lives in my hometown.*

GENE: What does he do?

JEFF: *He sells old radio shows. He started doing that when we were teenagers, he started taping them off of the radio, and now he's got the biggest collection of old radio shows in existence.*

SHANNON: Gene, did you get the name for the movie STILETTO from this?

GENE: Yes. I have a feature film that I am developing, and it was originally called something else but I changed the title to STILETTO.

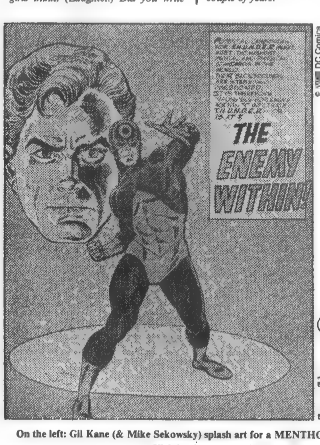
JEFF: *That's wild. You see, this stuff all goes back.*

GENE: Incidentally, there's no other fan anywhere *ever* who started reading Marvel comic books and then wound up *becoming* a Marvel comic-book character.

JEFF: *You're absolutely right.*

GENE: Thank you. *(Laughter.)* Except for the issues of CRAZY where the editors would end up in their own magazine.

JEFF: *Hey, here's a name that I know,*



On the left: Gil Kane (& Mike Sekowsky) splash art for a MENTHOR story (Tower Comics). On the right: Gene "Simmons" Klein's mimeographed artwork from one of his (many) fanzines.

"I'd literally draw and write on the stencil, no

© 1988 DC Comics

Neal Adams' last BATMAN (story) artwork came with this, issue #255 (inks by Dick Giordano).

this guy that did reviews for you, Don D'Amassa. He writes horror novels now.

GENE: Really?

JEFF: *Yeah, he has some paperback horror novels out. It's a small world. Here's a review of MEN OF MYSTERY where you say, "Their best number yet, cover is by the pro Charles Flanders, there are various and sundry items, among them being a long well-done study of THE LONE RANGER . . . and even a column by Klein." (Laughter.)*

SHANNON: You loved yourself the whole time, didn't you? *(Laughter.)*

GENE: It's a good thing I stopped. *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *Really, otherwise the two of you would not be together.*

SHANNON: Did you draw this?

GENE: That's not a bad strip.

JEFF: *Who drew it?*

GENE: I can't remember his name.

JEFF: *Let's see, is this JOHNNY JANUARY? No, this is PSYCHO, THE TELEKINETIC MAN —*

GENE: Which originally was JOHNNY JANUARY.

JEFF: *Okay. Is that a character you still own? You could make a movie out of it some day.* (Laughter.) *Where are the credits on this?*

SHANNON: *(Looking at a MEN OF MYSTERY cover)* Who was **Charles**

planning, no nothing — whatever would come out."

Flanders?

JEFF: *He was the actual artist of the LONE RANGER comic strip at that time. I wouldn't dare to put my artwork in there, I can't draw.*

SHANNON: I thought all of you guys could draw.

JEFF: *Well, we like to think we can. (Laughter.)*

GENE: Here's a little piece of **Klein** art, taken from a **Ditko** panel. Here's another one. I'd literally draw and write on the stencil, no planning, no nothing — whatever would come out, would come out.

SHANNON: Do you know who else used to do this? **Hugh Hefner.**

GENE: Hugh Hefner did *exactly* the same thing, fanzines.

JEFF: *Really?*

GENE: But going back to the '30s.

SHANNON: We had dinner up there, and Gene and Hef talked about comics the whole time.

JEFF: *Is that right? Well, I know he's a big comics fan. He used to employ Jack Cole for cartoons — you remember Jack Cole?*

GENE: Sure.

JEFF: *Well, what happened? Did you leave comics behind at some point, like at the end of college?*

GENE: No, I still read them.

SHANNON: That's his first stop at the newsstand. *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *How many different fanzines did you actually put together?*

GENE: I published COSMOS originally, and then it became COSMOS STILETTO. Then I had FAUN, and then TINDERBOX. But they were all being published sort of at the same time. I don't know *where* these titles came from. *(Laughter.)* TINDERBOX was all comics. Then there was one called ADVENTURE, it was sort of a SCREEN THRILLS ILLUSTRATED.

JEFF: *I used to love that magazine.*

GENE: Yeah, I loved it.

JEFF: *Remember the first issue with the guy grinning like an idiot?*

GENE: "You'll be *amazed!*" *(Laughter.)* And I loved SPACEMEN, the magazine that **Forry Ackerman** put out. I just loved it, because it was serious. *(Shannon leaves to answer phone.)*

JEFF: *What other fanzines do you remember from that time?*

GENE: Oh . . . GIALAR, ISCARIOT, ALTER-EGO, MASQUERADER, COMICS SCENE, WEBSPINNER, QUARK. The *range* of fanzines encompassed *all* of fandom. Genzines, science-fiction fanzines, horror.

JEFF: *Did you write for a lot of them?*

GENE: Everything. I wrote for everything I could.

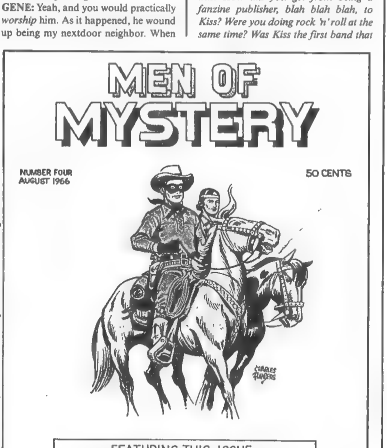
JEFF: *The thing that's going to happen as a result of this interview is that all these guys are going to go back to their closets and see if they have a Gene Klein article. (Laughter.)*

GENE: I wrote hundreds. For awhile there were the comics fans, who couldn't stand the genzines or the science-fiction fans, and the science-fiction fans who couldn't stand the fanzines or the comics fans. I used to go to the Lunacons, which were the science-fiction conventions, and also the comic-book conventions, the comicons and so on, and the comic-book conventions were *always* wilder. The science-fiction cons were much more serious, very studious. **Isaac Asimov** would get up and start talking —

JEFF: *Pontificating.*

GENE: Yeah, and you would practically *worship* him. As it happened, he wound up being my nextdoor neighbor. When **Kiss** started to really fly, I took an apartment in New York next to his, and I would see him in the elevator. In *fact* — this is very sick — I remember his speech in the 1967 Lunacon. He says, "So, I've written 238 books, and I remember I was only thirteen years old and my father bought me a typewriter, but I couldn't type so he had this *beautiful* woman come over to teach me to type, and my father was *horrified* because all he could hear was that we were talking, so he came in to listen to what we were saying, and the woman said, 'Here, let me show you what to do with your fingers.' He was *horrified!*" *(Laughter.)* That's almost verbatim, I couldn't tell you why I remember that.

JEFF: *Well, I can certainly begin to see where Kiss came from, as a result of all of this. How did you get from being a fanzine publisher, blah blah blah, to Kiss? Were you doing rock 'n' roll at the same time? Was Kiss the first band that*


MEN OF MYSTERY
NUMBER FOUR
AUGUST 1966
50 CENTS
CHARLES FLANDERS
FEATURING THIS ISSUE-
THE LONE RANGER-PART I
BY ALLEN LOGAN
© 1966 Jeff Gelb (Lone Ranger TM & ® Lone Ranger Television, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Cover to Jeff's MEN OF MYSTERY #4, by Lone Ranger artist Charles Flanders (1966).

"The Social Significance of the Panel Graphic Artform."

you were in?

GENE: Yeah, the first professional band. I mean I had had club bands that did Top 40, but when I decided to go pro, you know, I decided why not take the elements.

JEFF: *Of comics?*

GENE: Yeah. So, you can find some of the BATMAN influence in some of the makeup. In fact the early costume had these wings, sort of bat wings, and anytime you'd see a silhouette you'd see those half-moon designs on his cape. Mix that with a little **Lon Chaney** and you've got the makeup.

JEFF: *So, it was all your influences? What did the rest of the band think?*

GENE: No, I don't think it's fair to say that, everybody came up with their own stuff. **Paul Stanley** had a star on his eye, which is not particularly a comic-booky kind of thing. The drummer, as it happened, was a big cat freak, loved cats, so he assumed a cat motif.

JEFF: *So, everyone assumed his own identity. But still, it was almost like the Fantastic Four —*

GENE: It was *exactly* like that, *exactly* like the Fantastic Four. And yet nobody else in the band was a comic-book fan. In fact, they thought it was silly. I'd point out to them a complete run of CONAN THE BARBARIAN, say, "Look at *that!*" "That's kid stuff." *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *The truth is you either get comics or you don't, it really means something to you or it doesn't make any sense at all.*

GENE: It's the only true American invention, besides rock 'n' roll, in the 20th century — I mean it's *purely* an American invention.

JEFF: *And yet, let's face it, I think one of the reasons fanzines were really popular in the '60s —*

GENE: Oh, that was my college paper, "The Social Significance of the Panel Graphic Artform."

JEFF: *Is that right?*

GENE: Yeah.

JEFF: *But wouldn't you agree with me that one of the main reasons we used to do these things was because pretty much if you read comics you were an outcast, you weren't normally very popular?*

GENE: It's true. I was aware of that. *(Reads from college paper.)* "From the moment comic books were introduced in 1934, in the form we're now familiar with . . ." See.

JEFF: *What did your teacher say?*

GENE: "A good paper, shows originality. I wish you could have tried it with a child, honors together with the paper."

JEFF: *Not bad.*

GENE: The basic premise of this paper was that comic books should be used in schools as a teaching aid.

JEFF: *Were you planning on becoming a teacher yourself?*

More artwork from Marvel's KISS comic, by Rich Buckler.

AT FIRST, THE PAINFUL RUSH OF FRIGID AIR INTO THEIR LUNGS--
--IS EVEN MORE STARTLING THAN THEIR UNEXPECTED REUNION.
TH-THAT'S TERRA FIRMA UNDER MY PLATFORMS! WE'RE BACK!
COULD BE, CURLY-- BUT WE STILL OVERSHOT JERSEY CITY--
--BY SEVERAL THOUSAND COUNTRY MILES!

FLANKEN THE DOG: Woof!! "This little guy loves me."

CONAN © 1989 M.E.G./REH Estate

Unused pencils from CONAN #1, by Barry (Windsor-) Smith. Hope you enjoy this, Gene — this one's for you.

GENE: I became a teacher, taught sixth grade in Spanish Harlem for a short time, and brought in issues of SPIDER-MAN. I brought everybody their own comic book and they thought this was great — they were actually *excited* about having something to *read*. I told these kids who could barely speak English, "This is your assignment, read this from cover to cover, and tomorrow I have the right to come in and ask you what any one of these words mean." And those were not kiddie words. They did well. But this was not a popular move in school.

JEFF: *That's too bad, but it was a good idea. Were you popular in school when you did the fanzine type stuff, or were you doing it as an outcast, as I said, who no one really understood?*

GENE: I did it because I *loved* it. I didn't have a social reason for it, for some reason I was reasonably popular in school. I had a group, a rock band. In fact, one of the other guys who helped me in one of the fanzines, **Sefto Gramagian** from Jackson Heights, went on to keep publishing fanzines, and may still. He started to love EC comics and then started to publish these *big* four-color photocopied fanzines that looked like WITZEND.

JEFF: *You must have loved the ECs, as a horror fan, didn't you?*

GENE: Loved them, but I didn't see them the first time through because I was too young.

JEFF: *Yeah, likewise.*

GENE: And not all of them, there were some *gory* parts of them — but the **Wally Wood** and **Al Williamson** stuff was just *breathtaking!* The science-fiction stuff was just breathtaking, beautiful.

JEFF: *Those are being reprinted now in these big bookcase editions, and they're wonderful.*

GENE: Yes.

JEFF: *And the nice thing is they hold up pretty well. You can read them now and still get kick out of the stories.*

GENE: One of the classic ones is about an astronaut who goes — I think you know which one I mean — goes to a planet that has robots and so on, they want to come into the federation.

JEFF: *Right.*

GENE: And they show this is the red zone and these are the bad robots.

JEFF: *And at the end he turns out to be a black man.*

GENE: Yeah, and he's crying, that's the last thing — I get *chills* whenever I think of that. He's flying home —

JEFF: *And finally takes off his helmet.*

GENE: But what *strong* social commentary!

JEFF: *Yeah. Even now it's very unusual for a book to be that effective. Well, so in any case, Kiss was, at least for you, an opportunity to turn all of these interests in comics and fantasy and horror into a reality. How did you feel when it got turned back into a comic book?*

GENE: Well, full circle, you know.

JEFF: *Yeah, it is exactly full circle. You told me that your initial artistic choice was Jack Kirby?*

GENE: He was, in fact this was going to be his last book for Marvel before he left.

FLANKEN THE DOG: Woof!!

GENE: This little guy loves me.

JEFF: *Gene is kissing his dog right now.*

GENE: Down, down. *(Flanken flops down at Gene's feet.)*

JEFF: *So, what happened with Jack Kirby?*

GENE: I guess they couldn't come to an agreement. But our first appearance was not in the KISS SPECIAL, we appeared in the thirteenth issue of HOWARD

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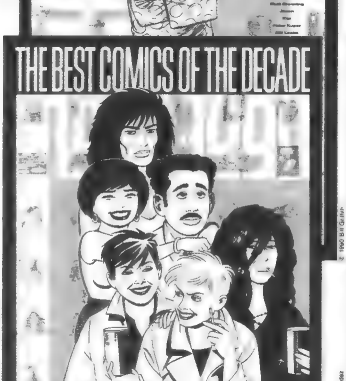

As assembled by the editors of *The Comics Journal*, this superb two-volume set captures most of the highlights from the exciting '80s. They're all here: young turks (Bagge, Boswell, Brown, Kuper, Sim), syndicated strip and panel cartoonists (Barry, Dougan, Feiffer, Stamaty), underground masters (Jackson, Peter, Shelton, Spain), the RAW gang (Burns, Panter, Spiegelman), the new wave of women cartoonists (Gebbie, Lay, Seda)—all this plus Alan Moore, represented with the 13-page, full-color "Pictopia," his and Donald Simpson's little-seen eulogy to the golden age of comic strips and comic books. New full-color covers by Crumb, Groening, Griffith, and Los Bros. Hernandez (who are all represented inside) as well. Special bonus: No Batcrap whatsoever.

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"Howard the Duck is exorcised and out comes Kiss."

THE DUCK, and the fourteenth! Howard the Duck is being exorcised and out comes **Kiss**, the rock band, of course with me leading the way with the tongue and everything.

JEFF: *Was that done with your permission, did you know that that was happening?*

GENE: Yes, in fact it was then that we first met with **Steve Gerber,** who was a big **Kiss** fan. And when he found out that I was a big comic-book fan it was, you know, instant love right away. So then *he* got the brainstorm of putting together the KISS comic book. Unbeknownst to **Stan Lee,** I had been up to his office as a kid, trying to get interviews, and always talked with **Flo Steinberg,** who was the secretary and all of that. They were always very nice. One of my claims to fame was I actually got a postcard back signed by **"Stan Lee** and the gang." And, you know, it said "keep going, don't give up," one of those nice, good pep talks. I remember showing the postcard to everybody, and of course the rest of the people had *no* idea who this was. I said, "You *idiots,* don't you *realize* who this is! **Stan Lee!!**" They had no idea what I was talking about. *(Laughter.)* "Who's this, the dry cleaning guy?" "*No,* it's **Stan Lee!**" *(Laughter.)* And I remember I always wanted **Gil Kane** to be a Marvel artist, but only when he inked himself.

JEFF: *You wanted him to work for Marvel instead of DC, you mean?*

GENE: Yeah, always, because he was very **Ditko**-ish. When somebody punched somebody, the bones became elastic, everything was twisted.

JEFF: *Who were your favorite writers and artists back then?*

GENE: I loved **Kirby** and **Ditko** and **Gil Kane,** but only when he wasn't inked by . . . like, when it wasn't too slick. **Murphy Anderson,** I *loved* when he inked his own stuff, those HAWKMAN issues were just terrific — in fact, the closest thing to MAGNUS, ROBOT FIGHTER, the *cleanest* looking book I ever saw. I don't know how he ever had the time to sit there and do that.

JEFF: *And those still read pretty well, by the way. I mean they are definitely adolescent fantasies, but they're fun.*

GENE: A bit dry for my tastes. The people, in terms of the material, just weren't real people, you didn't really care. But your jaw drops at the artwork!

JEFF: *Right, that Russ Manning artwork.*

GENE: I know. **Russ Manning** then did some war books for . . . CREEPY and all that.

JEFF: *BLAZING COMBAT.*

GENE: BLAZING COMBAT. One of those was *astounding,* almost like photographs.

JEFF: *No, you're thinking of Russ Heath.*

GENE: You're right, **Russ Heath.** *(Makes game show buzzer sound.)*

JEFF: *It's an easy mistake. I remember the issue, there's one story in particular that just knocks your socks off.*

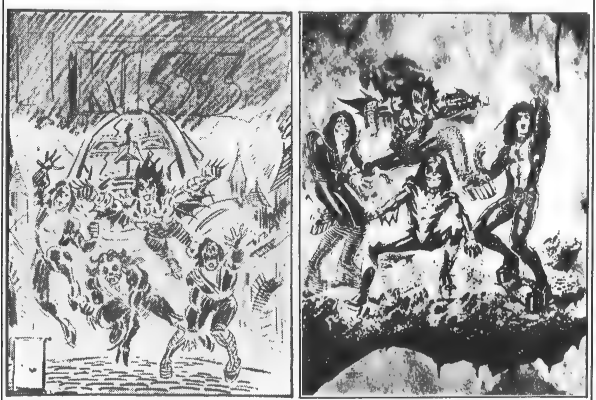
GENE: You look at it and you would *swear* they're photos — just *astounding!*

JEFF: *He's living out here now, working in animation. In fact, he does the storyboards for the Saturday morning SUPERMAN cartoons. What comes around, goes around. What happened to your comic collection?*

GENE: I went into, when I was in college . . . actually even a little before that, I started a business buying and selling comic books. People would have them in their attics and I would say to them, "Hey, I'll give you a buck a pound."

JEFF: *I'll bet you got some good stuff.*

GENE: *Terrific* stuff! Early MARVEL MYSTERYs, DETECTIVE COMICS from *very* early.



Left: The original (unused) cover sketch by John Romita Sr. Right: The finished cover by Alan Weiss & Gray Morrow (wrap-around back cover not shown).

"Jenette Kahn and I have been talking

JEFF: *You were still living in New York?*
GENE: Yes.
JEFF: *That's the place to go because there must have been a lot of people with stuff in their attics.*
GENE: That's right. So, I got early issues, I had SUPERMAN #4 and #3, bought 'em for a dollar a pound.
JEFF: *Did you like the Golden Age comics as well as the newer stuff?*
GENE: They never had as much soul, they were always sort of just on the surface, but the thing that hits you, makes your heart pump, is that you're holding history. That's the stuff we're always reading about, so just the fact that I actually *held* a MARVEL MYSTERY In my hand, or an early SUPERMAN — you go, "I'm holding it in my hand!" I also held the first issue that Namor was introduced in, the Sub-Mariner — who for years I called Sub-Mareener.
JEFF: *I did too — and you were so embarrassed when you found out that wasn't really what you were supposed to say.*
GENE: Yeah. *(Laughter.)* And I was so amazed when I found out — do you know how Namor got his name?
JEFF: *No.*
GENE: It's Roman backwards. I didn't make that up, that was in one of the letter columns; somebody asked where it came from and **Stan Lee** said, "Oh, that's Roman backwards."
JEFF: *Ingenious. Well, what happened to all of this stuff?*
GENE: I sold the stuff, at that point it was the way I supported myself. It breaks your heart.
JEFF: *You'd rather have those books back?*
GENE: Sure I would. I still have a collection. I have a complete run of CONAN, for a long time I loved those books. And SILVER SURFER, *both* of those books were really *extra*ordinary comic books! They were just terrific. I always thought Viking Prince should have been a Marvel character. But anyway, along the way I was developing some films, feature film — which I'm still doing — and **Joe Kubert** and I got together, he did some drawings for a character I created called Gabriel, which I still have the original pieces for. This was a black cowboy during the 19th century after slavery, who wandered through the West, and it was his story.
FLANKEN: Woof!!
GENE: He drives me crazy.
JEFF: *I guess so.* (Laughter.)
GENE: He does tricks, you want to see him?
JEFF: *Sure.*
GENE: Flanken, sit. *(Flanken sits.)* Speak.
FLANKEN: Woof!!
GENE: He does like fifteen things. Watch this — sit down. *(Flanken sits.)* Flanken, go away. *(Head down, tail between legs, Flanken departs.)* I'm sorry, come here.
FLANKEN: Woof Woof!! *(Flanken bounds back to Gene.)*

about doing books on characters in songs."

JEFF: *That's great! (Laughter and woofing.)*

GENE: I taught him, he's a good boy. Where's your toy? Go get it! *(Flanken searches around for toy.)*

JEFF: *He's looking. So, what did having a comic for themselves mean to the rest of the band — anything?*

GENE: Well, you know, they were happy with it, but at the same time we had pinball machines and **Kiss** this and **Kiss** that.

JEFF: *So this was a minor thing.*

GENE: For them. For *me* it was a dream come true. We had some people who *insisted* on being involved with it, so **Steve Gerber** wasn't able to write the whole thing himself — but to make a long story short, the next step —

FLANKEN: *(Whines.)*

GENE: What's the matter? I think he probably stepped on something, he's biting his foot or something. *(Break while Gene sees to Flanken.)* Maybe he was bitten by something. Anyway, right at the same time Hanna Barbera and we put together an idea —

JEFF: *For a cartoon series?*

GENE: Originally we started talking about a cartoon series, but we were not anxious to do that because it would have kiddie-ized the group a little bit too much, too fast. But, there was a two-hour movie that we co-produced where the essence was still the same idea, it was the Fantastic Four, I had flying abilities and breathed fire and so on

JEFF: *Is that the film that actually did come out on TV?*

GENE: Yeah.

JEFF: *What was it called?*

GENE: KISS MEETS THE PHANTOM, just an *awful* thing, but it's certainly as good as CAPTAIN AFRICA. *(Laughter.)* Did you ever see that?

JEFF: *No, but I know what you're talking about. I don't remember you guys having super powers in that show.*

GENE: We did, super strength, flying, breathing fire. But I remember *specifically* we were going to launch the **Kiss** comic book with **Stan Lee** flying up to Buffalo with us — and he did — and we poured our own blood into the ink.

JEFF: *A classic* promotional gimmick. Did you really do that?

GENE: We actually did it, with a certified public accountant and all, and there are books out there with our blood in the ink. *(Laughter.)*

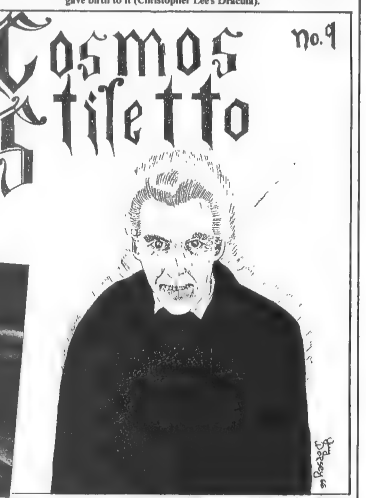
JEFF: *That's wild.*

GENE: And while **Stan Lee** was sitting next to me, I was reeling off facts so he knew I was serious about this, and it was obvious to him very quickly that I knew what I was talking about. I'd say, "I remember the *mistake* that you made in this story," and, "Why did you and **Steve Ditko** not get along, is he really crazy?" *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *Well, what books have you been reading lately? Have you picked up on any of the unusual DC stuff?*

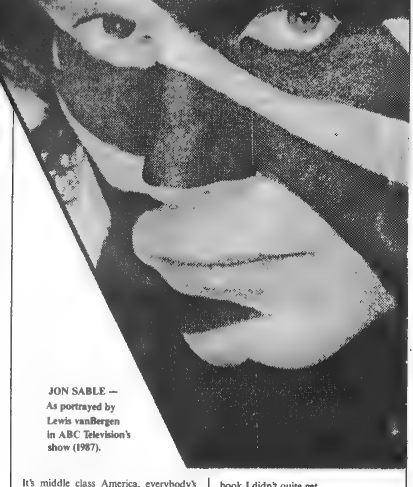
GENE: Sure. **Jenette Kahn** and I have been talking about doing some DC books on some of the characters that I've written about in songs. I wanted to bring back a sort of a PATSY AND HEDY kind of book, because I wrote a song once called "Christine Sixteen" that I want to turn into a comic book. Christine Sixteen is sort of a modern young **Madonna**, a sixteen-year-old girl, and the book would be for girls. There are no comic books now for girls, and there *used* to be an audience for PATSY AND HEDY and KATY KEENE and so on, and there's still the Archie stuff. The Archie stuff is fine for the humor, but it pushes the wrong buttons for me.

Cover from Gene's fanzine COSMOS STILETTO #9, along with the photo that gave birth to it (Christopher Lee's Dracula).



COSMOS STILETTO © 1966 Gene Simmons

"I was Jon Sable, we shot the scenes."



JON SABLE — As portrayed by Lewis vanBergen in ABC Television's show (1987).

It's middle class America, everybody's white and attractive — it's *warped*, it's *very* warped.

JEFF: *So, you have stayed in touch with comic books over the years.*

GENE: Sure, yeah.

JEFF: *Did you read WATCHMEN, the Alan Moore series?*

GENE: That's being developed into a film, my friend **Joel Silver** is developing that with **Terry Gilliam.**

JEFF: *That's right. What did you think of that, did you enjoy it?*

GENE: I thought WATCHMEN was almost *too* much. It was so big, it was so eloquently written — I mean it *is* a novel. It's very very cynical about the quality of life, what is it all about, all of that, and yet also very daring for a comic book. It broke a lot of ground, it was so brave.

JEFF: *Did you like DARK KNIGHT?*

GENE: Yes, very much. I thought he took some real chances. THE SHADOW book I didn't quite get.

JEFF: *Yeah, likewise, it was a little too dense.*

GENE: It was so complex and Shangri-la and so on, but it's brave storytelling. It wasn't just, "Hey, another new character, it's Poolman!" *(Laughter.)* "By a freak accident that occurred while he was cleaning the pool, irradiated chlorine and bleach ran into his fingertips and he became *Poolman!" (Laughter.)*

JEFF: *Well, you know, if it was 1966 we probably would have done that. But I suspect, that like myself, it's pretty hard for you to read an issue of FANTASTIC FOUR or SPIDER-MAN anymore.*

GENE: Every once in awhile I pick up an issue, but it just wanders. The last couple of issues that appealed to me at all were two or three years ago and they were trapped on another planet, the whole planet was a living thing.

JEFF: *Yeah, that was from John Byrne's run on that book, which wasn't that bad.*

GENE: It was okay.

JEFF: *But it is a little tough and you start to leave at least some of it behind after awhile.*

GENE: Well, but think of the run, it's been astounding. On the other hand, as long as there are new fans and new points of view, it's gonna be fine. But obviously the future seems to be the alternate press.

JEFF: *Right, the independent publishers, the ones that aren't afraid to take chances.*

GENE: I try to buy the undergrounds. In fact, I started buying JON SABLE a few years ago, and then, because I started acting in films, Taft Broadcasting — which is the company that now owns Hanna-Barbera — somehow, either I approached them or they approached me . . . They approached me about doing SABLE. I brought in the director who directed me in WANTED: DEAD OR ALIVE, **Gary Sherman,** and we developed it together. I designed the new makeup, because I didn't think I could just do that, it seemed very **Kiss** like, those sharp lines on his face, so it was changed more to a sort of generic commando where it would just blend in — I thought the more realistic he was on television, the better it would work. We actually shot a two-hour pilot in Chicago in January of '86, and this was something I wanted to do, I was Jon Sable, we shot the scenes and so on.

Before the thing was through, halfway through the shoot, I get some papers, they're asking in essence for me to sign for five to seven years. I couldn't do that. What I wanted to do was to make sort of a PERRY MASON series out of it, do three or four movies a year, because if you turn it into a weekly then it becomes pap. But you can make it really special if you do three or four per year, and then I could do it, my schedule would permit it. But they wouldn't go for it, so they bought me out and another guy came on, whose name I don't remember, and the show went on for six weeks and got pulled. It was not done particularly well, I thought.

JEFF: *Were you involved with the creators of that book when you were doing it? Were you talking to Mike Grell?*

GENE: Sure.

JEFF: *I had high hopes. I had heard about that, and I've liked SABLE since it started, so I had high hopes for it. I would have loved to have seen your pilot. We'll have to have a screening of it sometime, you must have a copy.*

"Either I know what I'm doing or I've had very good luck."

Splash page from HOWARD THE DUCK #11. Gene & Kim's second appearance. Artwork by Gene Colan & Steve Leialoha (1977).

GENE: I don't have a copy. Part of the deal was, "Hey, here's your money, good-bye."

JEFF: *No kidding, you never even got to see it?*

GENE: Well, I saw dailies. I was brilliant *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *And now you're doing something with DELTA TENN?*

GENE: Right. Shannon got a piece of fan mail from this guy **Mark Mardrosian**, he sent her a couple of the books, and in the second issue there was a letter that said, "Gee, this looks like **Sybil Danning**," and he said, "No, this was patterned after **Shannon Tweed**." When I found that out I said, "Hey, you're serious about your acting career, you should get the rights to this character and I'll help you develop it into a series.

JEFF: *But Shannon is not a comics fan.*

GENE: No, doesn't know the first thing about it, doesn't understand it or anything.

JEFF: *What does she think about your interest in the field?*

GENE: She trusts my gut. *(Laughter.)* Either I know what I'm doing or I've had very good luck, pick one of the two or a little of each. *(Laughter.)* So, I now own DELTA TENN and it's now being pitched, in fact we already have a blind pilot, which means the pilot will be done,

"I'm going to start writing a book — Kiss, the lifestyle."

we don't have to sell the idea. The two guys that are going to — here's a little sidenote — the two guys that are going to "produce/write" it are **Matt Weisemann** and **Jeff Loeb.** The very first movie they ever wrote was COMMANDO, the big **Schwarzenegger** hit, and they've written TEEN WOLF and a couple of other things, and they are now writing the second THREE MEN AND A BABY.

When I was filming RUNAWAY in 1984 in Canada, a good friend of mine introduced me to these two guys, they were comic-book fans and didn't know anything about writing films or anything. But since they knew me, and I was interested in getting a script written just for me, we sat down and outlined this idea for me. I was going to be an Israeli, since I am Israeli, a Mossad sort of guy who retires and is no longer interested in killing people and just goes away to the woods with his little girl.

JEFF: *Wait a minute —*

GENE: *You've* got it. *(Laughter.)* Together we came up with the basic premise of COMMANDO. The idea was they would finish the script and then I would take it around and try to set it up as a vehicle for me, and pull them along with it. So when RUNAWAY was finished I got the script for COMMANDO, I thought it was damn good, and showed it to a producer and I was told, "Nah, you don't want to do this, this is crap." So I thought, "Well, this guy must know what he's talking about," and I sent the script back to them. Six months went by and I said, "The hell with this, I have enough money, I'll go buy the thing myself." Too late, **Joel Silver** had already optioned it and it was on its way.

JEFF: *And the rest is history — that's a very big film.*

GENE: I don't think it would have been anywhere near as big with me, because obviously most of the appeal is the idea that it's **Schwarzenegger.** That doesn't change the basic premise, the idea is a good idea. Originally, the idea was there was an **Idi Amin** style dictator that the Mossad wanted the retired guy to go kill, only he could do it, but he didn't want any part of it — so they got some guys to kidnap his daughter and make it look like it was done by the **Idi Amin** guy.

JEFF: *That would have been very good — and you're working with these same guys on DELTA TENN?*

GENE: Yeah, they *love* comic books. In fact, they're developing something for Universal, I think it's the Flash. Anyway, this year is when the DELTA TENN pilot is going to be done, and if it sells then by January we'll be in production.

JEFF: *That's great, that'll be fun. Well, let's end this by updating people about what you're up to, aside from going to the newsstands.*

GENE: I'm going to start writing a book, sort of autobiographical but not so much about **Kiss** as about the lifestyle. The backbone of it is this kid who comes here, to the land of milk and honey and the American dream and all of that. But mostly it's a book about girls. *(Laughter.)*

Photo © 1978 Forrest J. Ackerman/Tsunoroo Room Co., Ltd.

Forrest (Forry) Ackerman, science fiction collector king, and former editor of FAMOUS MONSTERS OF FILMLAND (at home).

Hopefully, it will be funny. And then I have a record company, Simmons Records, that just released its first product,

Before there was a Fantastic Four there was Jack Kirby's CHALLENGERS OF THE UNKNOWN (from DC Comics). This panel is from their first appearance (SHOWCASE #6, 1957).

UNDER THESE STRANGE CIRCUMSTANCES, THE MOST UNIQUE ORGANIZATION ON EARTH IS BORN... ONE DARING EXPLOIT FOLLOWS ANOTHER IN THE SUCCEEDING MONTHS. THE HEADLINES BLARE THE NAME-- CHALLENGERS OF THE UNKNOWN!
ACE MORGAN FLIES 2500 MPH BREAKS ALL RECORDS
DAREDEVIL DEFIES UNKNOWN AND WINS!
THE PLANE THAT DID IT --
RECORD
PROF HALEY GOES DEEPER YET
FAMOUS SKIN-DIVER TESTS EXPERIMENTAL SUIT UNDER OCEAN
NEWS EAGLE
NEW SERUM PROVES NON-FATAL TO RED RYAN!
"I'M LIVING ON BORROWED TIME ANYWAY" SAYS Red.
GIVEN 100 TO ONE CHANCE-- HE LIVES!
PHIL PRESS
ROCKY DAVIS IN AMAZING RESCUE
SAVES EXPLORING PARTY IN UNMAPPED JUNGLE
FACES UNKNOWN DANGERS AND BRINGS 'EM BACK ALIVE!

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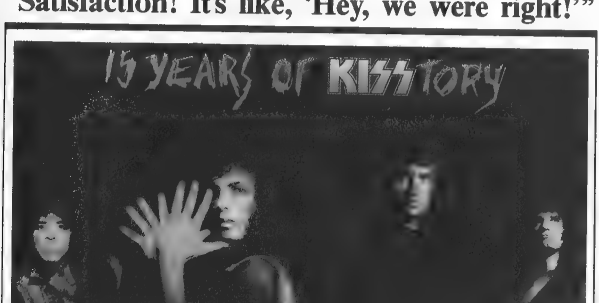
"Satisfaction! It's like, 'Hey, we were right!'"



called **House of Lords,** which is doing very well on the charts. Two more are coming up, one is called **The Hunger,** which is another rock band from California, and a guy whose name is **Loz Netto.** He's an English guy, a funkmeister, very not-at-all rock 'n' roll. And there's going to be a fourth act, a group called **Wet Engine** out of Canada.

JEFF: *That's a great name.*

GENE: Thank you!

JEFF: *You came up with that name?*

GENE: And **House of Lords** and **The Hunger. Wet Engine** will be coming out by September. So, about four acts a year, not counting the management company which handles **Lisa Minelli's** recording career and three or four other acts.

JEFF: *That's probably enough to keep you busy even without Kiss.*

GENE: Oh, that's right, **Kiss** begins working on its 23rd album this summer. We just finished negotiations for an extension to our contract, if you can believe it — another ten years.

JEFF: *Wow, can you believe it?*

GENE: No. *(Laughter.)* It's been fifteen so far.

JEFF: *That's pretty amazing — with the same label?*

GENE: The same label, and we just received our twentieth gold and seventeenth platinum album for SMASHES, THRASHES AND HITS, which is not even a new album, just some older stuff remixed.

JEFF: *Not bad for a guy that grew up a comics nerd.*

GENE: Yeah. *(Laughter.)* I had thousands of comics. I remember when I would sell off parts of the collection, I'd have my mother's laundry thing, like a two-wheel cart that you would pull, and I'd fill that up — no more than a thousand, because you couldn't fit more than that in. People would say, "What are you doing, why don't you just throw them away?" They'd have no idea. And girls never got it, either — *never* understood. "Why do these guys dress like this? Why are they flying through the air?" *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *Right, right. The closest I have been able to get is to find a wife who at least puts up with it. She doesn't get it, but she puts up with it. I've never been able to get her to read one. Has Shannon ever read anything —*

GENE: Well, I'm not married and I don't intend on being married ever. *(Laughter.)* But has she ever read a comic book — no. But she will . . . It's interesting how comic books really are entering the mainstream. The language has entered the mainstream, words like "fanzine, fandom." Those were words that didn't exist. And "sci-fi" — thank you, **Forry Ackerman.**

JEFF: *Have you ever been to Forry's house?*

GENE: I've never been in his house, but I know about the Ackermansion and all of that. I couldn't do that, I'd never leave. *(Laughter.)* I'd be scared to death if there was a fire or something.

JEFF: *Yeah. He's trying to sell it off now to a library, I hope somebody takes him up on it. It's a wonderful collection, I've seen it and it's just mind-boggling.*

GENE: I hope it's never destroyed. Also, about the mainstream, when you think about it, Robocop is a Marvel character.

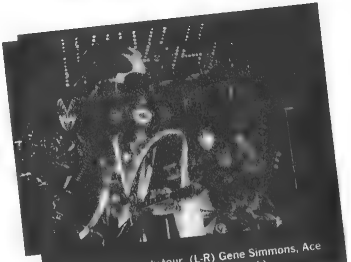
JEFF: *Absolutely.*

GENE: That's Iron Man if there ever was one — Iron Man meets the Enforcer, that's what that is. And more of it's coming. BATMAN's coming. Comic books have won, they really have made a dent in America.

JEFF: *And that makes me feel really good.*

GENE: Satisfaction! It's like, "Hey, we were right!" *(Laughter.)*

THE PROJECT by Gene Klein



KISS 1979 *Dynasty* tour. (L-R) Gene Simmons, Ace Frehley, Paul Stanley, Peter Criss (back).

All photos/artwork © 1988 Mercury Records/KISS Organization Ltd. unless otherwise noted.

From the moment comic books were introduced in 1934 (in the form now familiar to us), they began to acquire certain characteristics that were to comfortably whittle a niche for them among the other mass media tools (among them: television/radio, newspapers/magazines and books).

Comic books (you may substitute Panel Graphics in its stead) were successful for a number of reasons, the most apparent one being a fine form of escapist literature, which it was. During the Second World War (through today), various heroes fought and eventually overcame their foes (Nazis, Commies, Mafia or other super heroes) and all within a comparatively short space of time. Reading a comic book involves a good fifteen minutes and in this time period, an elaborate plot is developed and carried through. Marshall McLuhan recently mentioned in an interview that the reason there are so many so-called drop-outs is that in this high speed system, patterns can be seen easily

KISS 1974 N.Y.C. (L-R) Paul Stanley, Ace Frehley, Gene Simmons, Peter Criss.

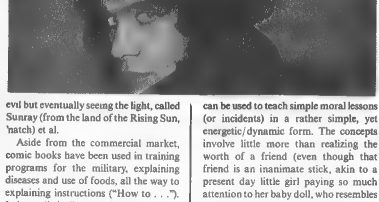
KISS 1982 *Creatures Of The Nigh*
Carr, Paul Stanley, Gene Simmon

enough and people are no longer content to be part of a set pattern. One of the ways they express discontentment is by dropping out.

Comic books (to carry this point over) show patterns (social and otherwise) very easily because the plot line is developed so quickly. However, the difference between comic books and real life is this: if comic books are predictable (or if the pattern is overly predictable) you simply put it down and pick up another issue or a different title, whereas in real life you don't have many possibilities, hence, the escapism. It is one of the few examples of escapist literature we have. It is probably popular with a great many people for that reason.

However, we should note that escapism is not the only reason people read comic books. Comics can also be educational in content, even though the fiction genre might be fantasy. For instance, in my own case, I blame comics for teaching me the English language (I originally came from Israel). The combination of the picture-word concept helped me remember words and phrases by simply recalling the scene. The same concept is used in first grades; using an apple as an example of a word beginning with A.

Of course another use for comics is to promote certain beliefs (social, religious or moral), usually referred to as propaganda. The comics were almost completely preoccupied with fighting/killing Nazis/Japs during World War II or Commies during the Post-War years. The important thing here, is that the books seem to reflect the times (in the same instance as that newly created form of music: Rock does). It is here and now. By and large, the books dealing with westerns, love, mystery and even as recent an event as World War II don't sell as well as the super hero line. Many speculations can be created from there, but one thing is clear, people are interested in today (and the future). Today, the propaganda battle seems to be against racism. (Thank Ghu!) There is a black super hero called the Black Panther, another called the Falcon, an Indian hero named Red Wolf and even a Jewish member of a commando group, whose name is Izzy Cohen, an oriental hero steered towards



evil but eventually seeing the light, called Sunray (from the land of the Rising Sun, 'natch), et al.

Aside from the commercial market, comic books have been used in training programs for the military, explaining diseases and use of foods, all the way to explaining instructions ("How to . . ."). It is, realistically speaking, an uncomplicated pattern of relaying information. The mind has little else to do other than to absorb the information given in the story line, with the illustrations helping him comprehend the concepts.

I think comic books could be used far more effectively in relating scientific and historical concepts (to name just two) than textbook. The books (comics) would be more successful simply because they're a more dynamic form of literature. They are shorter (and unfortunately, something that consumes too much time is something that doesn't make it, simply because everything/everyone is moving at such high speeds that among the treasures of the world, time is a high-priority one), they are concise and interesting as opposed to text books, which are long, far from concise and quite frankly, not interesting at all (unless of course, you happen to be a bug on the subject matter, in which case what you read doesn't matter, just as long as it's about your subject matter).

One may start to argue that comic strips would then limit the imagination of the pupil, but this fear can be put to rest by examples #1 and #2 (included in the back). They can be used in either or all: Creative Writing, Sociology, Psychology, Ethics, English et al. An assignment might include the following instructions: "Write about this." The subject matter could turn into anything, but the beginning stimuli would come from the two strips. Something along these lines seems just a wee bit more relevant and (damn it) more interesting than "What I did last summer or week or vacation or who cares". In interpreting the strips, there would be no right or wrong interpretation. The concept of "No, Johnny, this is wrong" has dulled more than one mind from ever trying again. It's a shame.

The other strip by Vaughn Bodé is included here to show how comic strips can be used to teach simple moral lessons (or incidents) in a rather simple, yet energetic/dynamic form. The concepts involve little more than realizing the worth of a friend (even though that friend is an inanimate stick, akin to a present day little girl paying so much attention to her baby doll, who resembles her much more, but does little more than our friend's stick), experiencing a good day and having food to eat (the hairy rhino isn't exactly our favorite meat dish but I think it's easy enough to understand that, once the effort is put into it, results usually follow) and finally, wondering if the stars are more than lights in the sky, or if sticks (like his friend) might also be found up there.

The dialog is simple and some of the words are spelled phonetically, all of which makes it just a wee bit easier for the child to read/comprehend.

I would also venture to say that this strip would be put to good use either in Science (perhaps while the course spends time studying early man and the things he might have done) or equally as well in English (by writing and explaining what one has gotten out of each of the cave man episodes). After completing a segment involving getting "the meaning" clear enough in their minds, an actual experimentation session might be tried where each pupil could try writing/drawing his own strip. This would further encompass creative writing/English and Art as well.

What I'd like to do then, is to incorporate the comic strip concept into almost all phases of school work. More importantly, it can act as a unifying agent, showing where and how each subject can be incorporated with other subjects to provide a more rounded picture of "what is actually happening with the world". Once the kids see how much fun the learning experience can be (after all, we'd be using their own communications media) their own enthusiasm would force them to go on to learn whatever it is that interests them. Comic books may not solve all the questions being asked regarding effective teaching, but it is one answer.

Oh yes, I read comics, too.

BACK ISSUES

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comics interview

LAST WORD

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NEEDS FEEDBACK FOR WATCHMEN PROJECT

Sirs:

I recently ordered your COMICS INTERVIEW Watchmen Special Edition, explaining that I am doing a research paper on WATCHMEN. Not only did I receive the edition, but a handwritten note wishing me luck and stating "Let us know if you need info on anything else."

I would like to thank you for showing interest, I was very touched. In reference to my paper, I plan to cover quite a lot of territory. The idea of WATCHMEN as literature, according to **Moore's** radical manipulation of the standard comic; a psychoanalysis of the characters, i.e., why did they choose to become masked heroes?; the relevance of the paralleling pirate comic; the changes in history due to the masked heroes; what **Moore & Gibbons** are really trying to get at. Et cetera! Quite a lot to cover, but well worth it. I also plan to interview comics shops frequenters and owners to see what *they* have to say about WATCHMEN. I am also formulating a letter to **Mr. Moore** to discuss some of his motives behind WATCHMEN.

If any folks out there would like to give me their own personal feedback, I would be extremely interested *and* grateful. Also, if anyone chooses, I would not mind keeping you posted on my progress. If either of these options seem appealing, please contact me at Trenton State.

Thank you very, very much!!
I hope to hear from someone!

Christine Finkenor
Travers 429
Trenton State College
Hillwood Lakes, CN-4700
Trenton, NJ 08650

ASTONISHINGLY CANDID!

Dear David,

I've just received COMICS INTERVIEW #76 in the mail and wanted to let you know how much I liked the issue. I think that **Dwight Zimmerman** did a fine job with his piece on me and the Bank Street Collections. There is one correction I'd like to make. The title of the **David Morrell** story that we adapted is "The Good Times Always End," not "Let the Good Times Begin."

There is also an oversight that I'd like to correct. I neglected to mention to Dwight that the four volumes were lettered by two dynamite men-with-a-pen: **Kurt Hathaway** and **Gary Fields.**

Overall, I enjoyed #76 tremendously. The interviews with **Boaz Yakin** and **Marc Silvestri** were astonishingly candid and revealing. But my favorite piece was **Seidman's** interview with **Bill Stout** — a man whose work I have admired for many years. I met Bill for the first time at this past San Diego Con . . . and was not disappointed. At the awards banquet, I sat near Bill and was able to purchase one of the last two copies of MICKEY AT 60. Not being in a litigious frame of mind I won't comment on its wit, perception or sophisticated humor. But I have enclosed copies of a few pages from it for your personal entertainment. Print them at your own risk.

I'd like to thank you for including me, and wish you the best of luck in the future.

Howard Zimmerman
241 Central Park West
New York, NY 10024

PERTINENT BUT ABRASIVE?

COMICS INTERVIEW Folks,

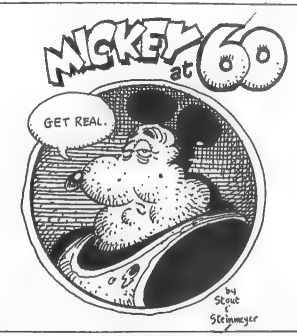
I was impressed with **Marc Silvestri** as a choice for interviewee: honest, talented, up and coming, etc. My reason for writing is his interviewer, **Paul Power.** I thought his attitude and comments to be crude at some points. I will concede, as I review the article, that he asked questions which were pertinent, and steered the conversation fairly well, but for the most part I found his tone abrasive.

For example, on page 28, column 3, where he makes the comment about **Chris Claremont,** "Oh, what does he know, he's just a writer." I realize **Mr. Power** was attempting light-heartedness, but I can't help but feel it was ill-timed.

What I'm trying to say is, he struck me as a distant cousin who's steadily draining your supply of beer nuts, brew, and toilet paper whilst trying to convince your best friends how close you were as children.

I enjoy your magazine — I work in a comic book store — thank you for your service.

Barbara Gilly
22 Brooks St.
East Boston, MA 02128



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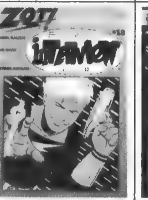

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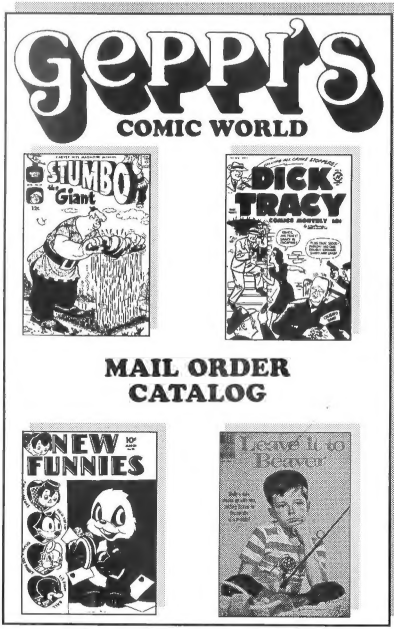

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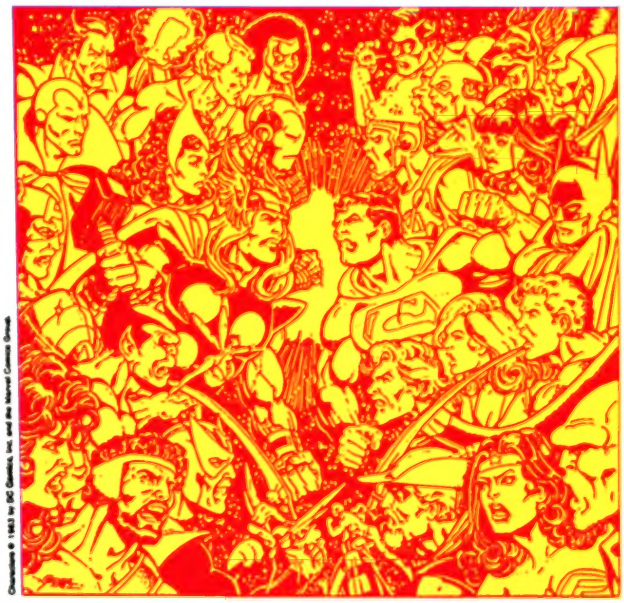

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